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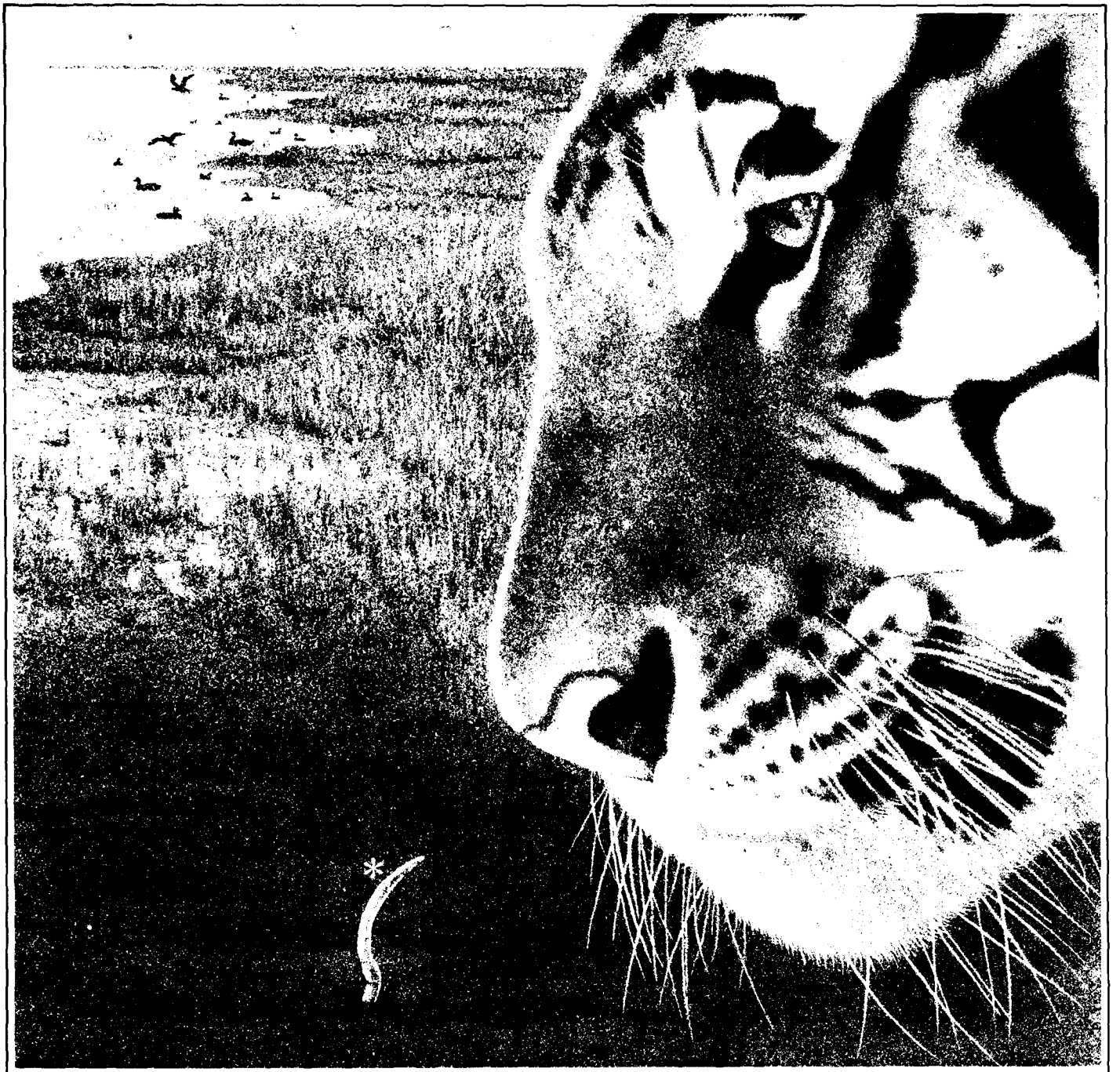

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May we ask you a couple of questions?

One. Which do you think is the most useful invention of the past hundred years or so?

Two. Which do you think will grow fastest in the next fifty?

You're bound to consider the internal combustion engine, the aeroplane, atomic energy and the microchip, of course. But how about telecommunications?

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1866, the Entrepreneur.

The founder of Cable and Wireless was a rather vigorous and determined entrepreneur called John Pender.

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With the dots and dashes of the Morse Code, it meant the United Kingdom was only a few minutes away from the eastern seaboard of the United States (Stock Exchange and Wall Street closing prices were transmitted daily).

By the end of the century he'd created a submarine cable empire that virtually covered the world and stretched for fifty thousand miles.

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Marconi made the British government an offer they couldn't refuse: that his telegraph service and our cable assets be merged.

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1950's, the voice.

Then in the mid 1950's the first coaxial cable was laid across the Atlantic, carrying distant voices. (Though you still had to queue-up to make a call.)

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Next came larger coaxials, then the miraculous fibre-optic cable carrying voice and data at the speed of light (the entire Encyclopaedia Britannica in a flash).

Now, computers and microwaves all play their part, but our real growth as a company has accelerated in the past four years.

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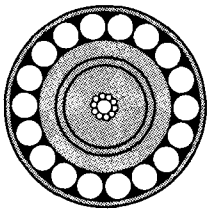
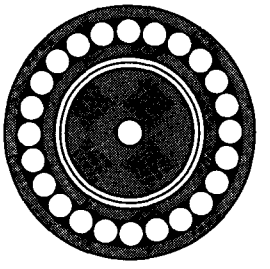
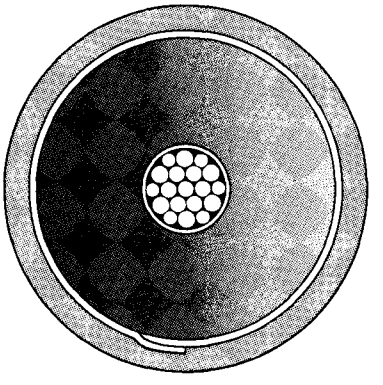


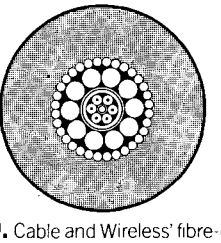
1866. First successful transatlantic cable. Roughly six months to transmit the Bible by Morse Code.



1956. First coaxial cable across the Atlantic. Thirty-six circuits bring phone calls as we know them today.



1974. Over 1,800 circuits – queuing eliminated.



1989. Cable and Wireless' fibre-optic cable to America. 12,000 circuits able to transmit the Encyclopaedia Britannica in a few zips of light.

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We hope we have shown how Cable and Wireless has grown bigger as the world, in communication terms, has grown smaller.

However, if you would like to know more, write to the Press Office, Cable and Wireless plc, Mercury House, Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8RX.

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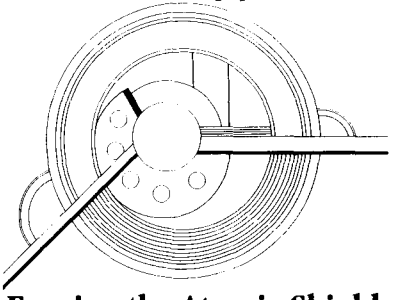

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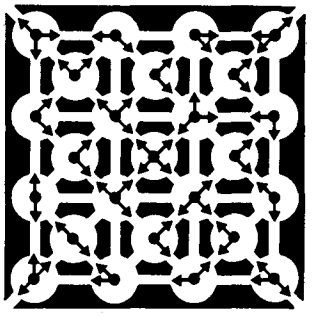
Kenneth Minogue

The Idea of Liberty & the Dream of Liberation

Two Themes in the Western Political Tradition



THE HIGHEST AMBITION of any philosopher is to destroy his subject. He seeks to map reality so perfectly that nothing will remain but to fill in the details. In our time, we are so attached to the idea that all theories are revisable that we do not usually take seriously the ambitions implicit in philosophy's project of destroying itself as a discipline by dying in the very embrace of reality itself. But earlier philosophers, and their disciples, did take this idea seriously; and that is how Hegel generated the "Young Hegelians" who, believing that the realm of thought had already been subdued, turned panzer-like against the helpless realm of practice. The world we live in is the terrain of this immense project of conquest, and the military metaphors which spring to mind in describing the situation merely reflect the way many of the participants understand themselves.

My central concern is to discuss one aspect of this relation between philosophy and the world of practice. I wish to invoke the idea of freedom, on which the whole battle hinges, and to explore this theme particularly in terms of one of its dominant metaphors. First, however, I want to pose the question in the familiar terms of politics and philosophy in the Greek city-state.

The activity of politics emerged in Greece when the inhabitants of the various cities learned how to live in terms of law. They had evolved, it would seem, from a tight social harmony whose glue was custom. They understood themselves as living within a natural order of things, from which men occasionally diverged as a result of the disorientation of passion or, more profoundly understood, as a result of mischievous intervention by the gods. We tend to imagine such customary societies as places in which each generation sought to follow its predecessors as exactly as possible, rather as those gas-blinded victims in the First World War behind the trenches held on to the shoulder of the man in front. But slowly these Greeks (or some of them) became more self-conscious, gained sight as it were, and over the centuries they developed what we recognise as the usages of politics.

Man transcended the concrete specifications of custom, which gave way to the abstract flexibility of laws, and the free space that opened up became an arena in which moral and political agency could flourish. It is no doubt true, as Marcel Mauss has written, that:

> "there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body, but also at the same time of his individuality, both spiritual and physical."[1]

But it is certainly true that these Greeks were among the first human beings actively to explore the possibilities of individuality. In discovering that individuality was a resource to be used rather than a threat of disorder to be feared, the Greeks took the first steps out of customary society.

POLITICS WAS born a twin: philosophy emerged from the same womb. Each was animated by the power of reason, but each conceived it differently. It was some centuries before these two activities took on their unmistakable identities, but they had hardly done so before they fell to quarrelling. The public power of Athens condemned and executed Socrates; and Plato in a series of dialogues condemned political activity as a world of illusion. In the famous parable of the Cave, he represented his fellow-citizens as prisoners who, having experienced nothing except the shadows on the wall of their cave, mistook these shadows for reality itself. Plato imagines, however, that one of these prisoners is set free and becomes able to observe the objects whose movement before the firelight actually casts the shadows; and then the prisoner is led out of the cave into the three-dimensional world of sunlight. It is striking that the prisoner has to be forced into freedom. Suppose, as Socrates tells his hearers in the dialogue (*The Republic*, tr. Cornford, 515):

[1] "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of the Person; The Notion of the Self" in Carrithers, Collins, Lukes (eds), *The Category of the Person* (1985), p.3.

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"Suppose someone were to drag him away forcibly up the steep and rugged ascent and not let him go until he had hauled him out into the sunlight, would he not suffer pain and vexation at such treatment. He would need, then, to grow accustomed before he could see things in that upper world."

The parable of the Cave continues to fascinate us because, among other reasons, it crystallises our endemic suspicion that somewhere—the party in the next cave, perhaps—there is a better class of reality to be found. Further, Plato was the first to popularise the idea that people who imagine that they are free may actually be all the more enslaved by that very conviction. Socrates characterises politics as men "fighting one another about shadows and quarrelling for power, as if that were a great prize. . . ."[2] Ordinary life is a form of servitude in which the slaves imagine they are free, and philosophy is on offer as the way of escape. But if this parable is to be construed as the philosopher's bid for power, it is recognised as being, like all bids for power, a dangerous game; for those who attempt to disturb the citizens in their dream-time risk suffering the fate of Socrates.

The fundamental distinction expounded in the parable of the Cave is between those who know and those who do not, between the wise and the foolish. There is therefore one thing at least in common between politics and philosophy: each depends upon a form of superiority of some men to others, though in the basis of the superiority they differ from each other. Indeed, in its extreme form, classical philosophy was tempted to construe the political and philosophical worlds as precisely reversed: in Plato, the ruler of a bad state is fundamentally a slave, while later Stoic writers, such as Epictetus, held that a slave can be essentially free. The equivocations by which freedom is slavery and slavery freedom were already in circulation over 2,000 years before Orwell's *1984*.

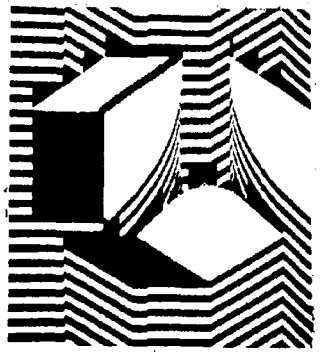
The most striking thing about this parable and the situation it represents is that those who were to be offered the gift of liberation were not some set of tribesmen sunk in custom, but citizens *already* exercising their freedom in an active political life. They were the beneficiaries of a long and progressive development. Whatever "liberation" might be, then, it cannot be the gift of freedom in the ordinary political sense. The Athenians had that already.

Just what liberation might be was in Plato's time (and has always since remained) a somewhat obscure matter. What the prisoner freed from the cave sees is the world of the forms, of which the cave is but a pale reflection; but these forms would seem to be objects of contemplation rather than guides to practice. The Socratic vision of bliss is evidently what happens to philosophers who have purified their souls, when they die. They are released from this world, we learn, as from a prison; and they live thenceforth without bodies.[3] In *The Republic*, they would in this life deny themselves some of the pleasure of contemplation in order to arrange the affairs of the mortals who would supply—and would seem to exhaust their significance in supplying—the material needs of these superior beings. For it is clear that Plato saw no independent value in the individual actions of free human beings. The highest calling to which they might aspire would be to act as a service-sector for the activity of contemplation.

There are, of course, those who think that the Platonic project was a return to the "closed society"[4] of custom whence both philosophy and politics had emerged. There is, indeed, some element of formal identity between Plato's philosophical state (on the one hand) and (on the other) the traditional idea of a natural order of human life to which all must conform. But Plato's was no mere movement back to the womb of time. Liberation was an idea that could only emerge *subsequent* to political freedom, and it represents a peculiar modification of that idea. It is the promise that we shall be enabled to live like the higher angels, freed from the messiness of ordinary life, and transcending the human condition.

The judgment that the *polis* was merely a prison-without-walls came to be one of the standard philosophical verdicts upon civil life. Philosophers were threatening to bolt the state in Plato's time; a century later, they found themselves locked out. They responded by setting up in their schools a kind of cosmopolitan freemasonry which stretched to all parts of the Mediterranean world. They despised the religions of the populace, and substituted a variety of forms of deism; against the positive law of the states in which they lived, they juxtaposed a law of nature. But few of them, even in bouts of mystical exploration, lost their conviction that they constituted a liberated élite which ought to rule the sublunary world.

1. The Changing Patterns



DISTANCE FROM the world in which they lived was, among the Stoics for example, the test of freedom. What they admired was what Epictetus attributed to Diogenes: "All things sat loose upon him—all things were to him attached by but slender ties." Diogenes had, Epictetus thought, "cast away every handle whereby slavery might lay hold upon him".[5] The freedom of the *agora* had retreated to the rather chilly and inaccessible reaches of these highly universalised minds; it was hoarded, in the manner of a miser, rather than exercised.

In the ancient world, then, the emergence of the practical activity of politics and the theoretical activity of philosophy had very quickly generated a set of ideas, all circling rather warily round the issue of freedom. Only by keeping these ideas distinct can we reconstruct the tendency to which each responded.

First, there was the idea of political freedom as exercised

[2] *The Republic*, 577, 520.
[3] *Phaedo*, 114 b-c.
[4] Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1944).
[5] *The Golden Sayings of Epictetus* (ed. Crossley, 1909), CXLI.

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by male citizens in the *agora*. It was identified with the capacity for taking responsible decisions about practical affairs, and with living under law rather than under the rule of a master. Although law may block some projects, and thus be no less frustrating than a master, it does not interfere with the very process by which individuals develop projects of their own. Indeed, even when it blocks one project, it challenges the imagination to produce another, and in this resides the dynamism of a free society. It is important to note that this idea of freedom presupposed a formal equality between citizens, each of whom was recognised as potentially capable of contributing some fragment of wisdom to any deliberation.

Secondly, Plato had postulated the possibility of a rare wisdom which would allow some to liberate themselves from the follies of the *hoi polloi*. Identified with philosophy and usually mystical in character, it was a rejection of political activity as incapable, by virtue of intellectual inferiority, of dealing with the problems of the *polis*. The project of liberation transposed Greek social inequality into a distinction between a small rational élite as against those incapable of serious rationality and in need of guidance. Instead of public decisions being generated through interaction between independent deliberators, philosophers would administer the state in terms of its idea.

Thirdly, one may distinguish what we may call philosophical freedom (by contrast with political freedom) as found especially among the Stoics. This is the freedom available to the philosopher or sage in imperfect social conditions; and it has its analogues in other civilisations. It might be characterised as the higher *anomie*, though all who enjoyed this form of freedom were perfect citizens of the city of the heavens, and perfectly obedient to its *nomoi*. The philosopher here has come to terms with his own powerlessness and the consequent irrationality of the world. Philosophical freedom has as its negative side detachment from the world. It has as its positive side the cultivation of Reason as the principle which allows us to recognise the necessity (or, alternatively, the absolute lack of necessity, which comes to the same thing) of the course of events in the world.

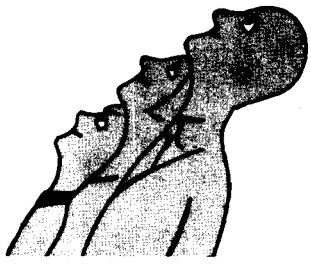
Now these are very different ideas to find themselves balancing upon the point of a word; and this fact explains the sequence of famous conflicts between philosophy on the one side and politics (or rhetoric) on the other. The dialogues of Plato are redolent of the mutual dislike of the City and the Academy; it put medieval "town and gown" in the shade. The way Hegel tells the story, it was an accident of immaturity, the human spirit not yet having developed the multilayered flexibilities of the modern world, flexibilities which allow philosophy and politics to coexist without evident conflict. Philosophy in Greece, Hegel suggested, was a private affair, while the modern state (*alias* Prussia) had realised its duty of making philosophy a part of the *res publica*.[6] But by Hegel's time, both philosophy and the state had changed their character; and it becomes necessary to clarify my use of the word "philosophy".

Philosophy is, I take it, the attempt to make sense of reality, or at least of the ideas we use in coming to terms with reality. The fruits of this unusual impulse to untrammelled theorising are likely to be highly miscellaneous; but there are two persistent types of outcome. The first happens when philosophers concentrate so hard on some question as to turn it into a special discipline of its own, equipped with its own technicalities. It is in this way that philosophy has become the fertile mother of disciplines, generating not only the sciences, but also subjects like logic and linguistics. Philosophy itself cannot go far down this road without losing its identity; it must step back and renew its commerce with reality as a whole if it is to remain itself. Although it is not (as Hegel insisted) "Penelope's web", it does involve a pretty constant process of intellectual reweaving, and while no patterns are lost forever, none remain unchanged either.

It is this synoptic role which leads philosophy into a second tendency, which is to generate beliefs for men (or at least men of an elevated philosophical inclination) to live by. Philosophy then comes to resemble a religion, and is spoken of in somewhat hushed tones as a source of wisdom in a world of folly. It was perhaps the unsophisticated, and later the corrupt, character of ancient religion which tempted classical philosophers to go further and further down this path. In treating classical philosophy, I shall be referring largely to this tendency of philosophising.

Philosophy thus monopolised intellectual seriousness in the ancient world, and almost irresistibly construed itself in terms of its superiority to the unlettered throng, sunk in superstition. It is hardly surprising in these circumstances that political authorities might at times feel threatened by its pretensions. When Cato the Censor had the Senate enact a ban on Greek philosophy after the celebrated discourses of the sceptical Carneades in 155 BC, he was merely expressing the plain man's (or the plain Roman's) dislike of unsettling intellectual gymnastics. But in later times the statesmen and the thinkers seem to have accommodated themselves well enough—until Christianity came along to disturb their tranquillity.

2. *Members of the Club*



CHRISTIANITY FOUND itself in competition with the schools of classical philosophy because it had abandoned the philosophical project of trying to make sense of the human condition in terms of reason alone. Instead, it was based upon faith in a redeemer whose rather exiguous recorded sayings were soon supplemented by an immense corpus of comment and interpretation, much of it generated in controversy with the philosophers. For while Christianity dethroned reason in one sense by claiming sovereignty for its own revelation, it installed reasoning quite decisively at the centre of practice by being a highly intellec-

[6] Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (1972), p. 118.

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tual religion. Since Christian allegiance was constituted by an act of belief, it could not rely upon natural affinities the way established communal religions could. But the relevance of Christianity to the development I am sketching lies, of course, not in its character as a religion, but in the transformation it effected in the assumptions Europeans brought to politics and practice. The thread we follow is the transformation in beliefs about the nature of the human beings who engage in politics.

Christians believed that all human beings were miserable sinners who had, from pride, dissipated a magnificent heritage. They had, however, been given—or perhaps only some of them had been given—a second chance of enjoying eternal bliss through the mercy of a providential God. Equipped with immortal souls, no longer able to stop the world and get off, human beings were guided to construe life on earth by projecting it on to the vast screen of eternity.

A crucial entailment of this view was a theological egalitarianism which precisely contradicted the classical position that man was a rational animal. For it will be evident that if man is defined as a rational animal, and if men differ widely in their rational capacities (as in fact they do), it must follow that some are more human than others. "Man", to put the matter in current jargon, becomes a normative conception; and the less rational—women, slaves, the *hoi polloi*, as it seemed to the Greeks—are to that extent the less human. Mankind was, thus, to be conceived of in terms of a continuum of varying human quality stretching up towards divinity and down towards the animal kingdom.

This formulation allows us to recognise that the philosophical sense of superiority to the common herd was not simply—as I have so far been treating it—mere vanity. No doubt it is always likely that vanity is modifying human conduct, but in the classical doctrine we also have a theory of considerable range. The philosophers, as participating in reason, possessed the idea. The idea of what? you might well ask. The idea of the world as a rational order of things, and of man as fitting into his proper place.

This idea has gone by all sorts of names at different times, ranging from Justice to Socialism. To be wise was to possess the idea, and to be foolish was, quite precisely, a failure of perception. The foolish, in other words, were construed as the "matter" of politics, and the activity of politics was, as several political philosophers of our century have emphasised, fabrication—the ordering of inert matter in terms of an idea. From this observation we might well generate the suspicion that wherever we detect assumptions of intellectual superiority creeping in, however disguised they may be, this conception of what it is to act in politics will not be far behind.

Christians rejected this view with some heat, attacking endlessly the "vain wisdom" of the world. Having, in the manner of a lower-class religion, equalised human beings (at a stroke, as it were) by equipping all of them—women and morons along with philosophers—with immortal souls, they proceeded to construe a human being as a bundle of affections. Love, *Agape*, or *caritas* was, for St Paul, the greatest of human qualities; and the evils of the world stemmed not from irrationality but from disorderly affections—above all, the sin of pride.

The implications of all of this for the development of the inner life are, of course, immense, but outside my scope. Let me just note an implication or two. Firstly, the idea of human rights would make no sense, except against the background of such a view; rights could obviously not be made conditional on human rationality. Secondly, the idea that all men are sinners (and women too, perhaps one should add, lest misunderstandings arise) necessarily excludes the kind of political melodrama in which some persons, groups, classes, or institutions are taken as essentially good and innocent, while other persons, groups, classes, or institutions are taken as essentially evil—political life being construed as a struggle between such goods and bads. In Christian terms, sin burrows like a worm into everything human.

THE CENTRAL IDEA Christianity brought to politics was that man, as a spiritual creature, is in important respects utterly distinct from nature. Classical philosophy, by contrast, assimilates man to nature, and to the rational conquest of nature. For something like a thousand years, the classical idea failed to revive after its defeat at the hands of St Augustine and the crusading intellectuality of the Church. Yet in the world of ideas, precious little is lost and gone forever. The idea whose course I am tracing revived, eventually got up, dusted itself down, and began to haunt the conversations of late-medieval Italy. It was evidently much changed, yet recognisable none the less. The resurrection is, in some but not all respects, full-blown in Machiavelli, in whom the superiority of a philosophical élite has been transposed into the superiority of those who have mastered political knowledge. The political world is inhabited by manipulators and manipulated, but the structure in which these operations take place has been the creation of the philosophers. There never was, Machiavelli tells us, any great founder of a city who did not have recourse to religion in the constitution of his state, because the populace do not understand the real reason for some laws.[7] That is why, for example, Numa, the second king of Rome, "feigned converse with a nymph".

Such a doctrine clearly reflects the imprinting legend of political foundation cultivated by the philosophers, and is most evident in the argument vulgarly translated as Plato's "noble lie" (*The Republic*, 414). In our day, it all sounds like a bit of Whig history. For we may hypothesise that the religious beliefs on which the cities of the ancient world were based must have been believed no less by the rulers than by the ruled, allowing for a certain slack and cynicism on the part of both parties. In later times, the philosophically inclined came to doubt the literal truth of these beliefs and, as is the way with philosophers, found new reasons for believing old things. "Give me the doctrines", as Chrysippus (who formalised Stoic doctrine) is reported to have said to Cleanthes, "and I will find out the proofs for myself."[8]

The philosophers then enrolled these legendary founders as

[7] Machiavelli, *Discourses*, vol. I, ch. xi.
[8] I. R. D. Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean* (1909), p. 8.

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members of the same superior club to which they themselves belonged. Political science, let me parenthetically suggest, began as a kind of deism of the political world; perhaps all science begins with getting the gods out of the picture. The noble lie is thus a foundation myth, less of cities than of the philosophical tradition itself. Powerless as they usually were to determine the actual course of events, they boldly imagined themselves to have created the very structure within which those events unrolled.

MACHIAVELLI IS NOT, of course, a philosopher in any very extended sense; he lacks all interest in metaphysics and it has been observed that he seems to take it for granted that there is nothing else but the Platonic cave. And yet, unmistakably, Machiavelli gives off exactly that feeling of superiority to the common herd which (as I have noted) so characterises the philosophers of the classical world as virtually to define them.

What is it that accounts for this curious junction of the classical and the modern in Machiavelli? The answer lies in the fact that he makes a significant shift in the understanding of how power is exercised in a modern state. The theory of the medieval realm had largely assumed that the ruler shared a common purpose with his subjects. They were bound to him by bonds of fealty. His business was to render them justice, and he could only "play politics" in his dealings with outside monarchs. No doubt this was an idealisation; and medieval kings had to keep a very wary eye indeed on what their barons got up to. Even in close and intimate associations like the family could be found what St Augustine called "viperous dissimulation",[9] but this was a practical realism which did not usually shake the framework of understanding. Machiavelli rebuilt that framework by taking it for granted that rulers must also be "politic" about their subjects, and must engineer the imagination, or *fantasia*, of these subjects. He is to this extent classical, in following the fabrication account of politics as the imposition of an idea upon pure matter. But he deviates in his recognition that *fortuna* is forever qualifying the reception of the idea in the real world. He thus recognises the course of events as essentially an outcome of conflicting purposes, and he is modern in finding this more of an exhilarating challenge than a deplorable feature of the world's constitution.

In Machiavelli, further, the superior knowledge of the philosopher was being put at the service of the ruler, but it often seemed that philosophy and its close ally science were potentially subversive of the political and religious foundations of society.

One solution to this problem would be to bring intellectual cultivation under much stricter control, invoking the laws against heresy and treason. The other solution was to recast the foundations of the state in such a way that philosophy could not threaten them. This was a project so successfully carried through in modern states that we may hear the complaint of a latter-day *philosophe*—namely Herbert Marcuse—even yet echoing down the corridors of time as he discovers that modern states can no longer simply be subverted by ideas. He called it "repressive tolerance."[10]

The hero of this project was Thomas Hobbes. In his reworking of the problem of order, not the least important move was that from Justice to Peace as the navigational beacon of the statesman. It was a move anticipated, of course, by Augustine and implicit in the intellectual scaffolding of Christianity itself. In emphasising the Christian versions of equality—equality of strength, equality in personal worth to oneself, even a certain basic equality of wits—Hobbes deliberately laid waste the philosophical claim to superior knowledge.

The state whose theoretical foundations he was creating had no need of dubious myths to keep the people in order. A sovereign should merely ensure that they were regularly reminded of the connection between law and order. Moving to the offensive, he despatched the intellectual claims of the ancients as "vain philosophy", as prating of invisible spirits, and useful only in sustaining priestly bids for power—a type of bid to the smell of which Hobbes's nose was finely attuned. Indeed, he was quite capable of turning the tables entirely by taking classical philosophy itself as a kind of myth for common men:

> "The vain philosophy of Aristotle [Hobbes wrote] would fright them from obeying the laws of their country, with empty names; as men fright birds from the corn with an empty doublet, a hat and a crooked stick."[11]

Modern states moved steadily, both in theory and in practice, towards constituting themselves on foundations so secure as to be initially incapable of being shaken by the invocation of an idea. Yet the tradition of classical philosophy, far from disappearing, has continued to thrive, largely in the theory of "the Western World" and the practice of "the Second and Third Worlds".

3. *Prison Theories*

CONSIDER THE extraordinary popularity of images of incarceration in modern intellectuality. They all descend, evidently, from the parable of the Cave, and I suggest that this tells us a good deal about what they entail. Instead of caves, however, we usually get cages, prisons, sometimes traps. The basic message incorporates two elements: *imprisonment* as a diagnosis of the reality of our present situation, and *a key* by which we may escape. It is clear that the element of the prison is more important than

[9] St Augustine, *The City of God*, vol. II (Everyman edition, 1945), XIX, ch. 5, p. 241.

[10] See Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr., Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (1969), pp. 93 ff.

[11] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil* (1851; ed. Oakeshott, n.d.), p. 442.

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the key, partly because, in rhetorical terms, we must be convinced that we really are in prison before we shall have any interest in the key; and partly because there are many keys and nobody is quite sure whether any one of them works, or, indeed, what would happen if they did.

Hence, given the intractabilities of the human condition, the one sure fact upon which the doctrine rests is that, for all the illusions of democratic freedom we imbibe in the course of our political life, we are actually encaged in invisible walls. Further, the point of the story of the Cave was to represent the human race as a set of people whose lives needed the expert direction of the idea. The inhabitants of the Cave were thus mere matter, the material of the idea. It follows that, to the extent that we are imprisoned, we are cut off from the idea; and that from the moment we realise that this is actually our situation, we begin to be illuminated by the possibilities of escape.

The usual vehicle of this imagery is a concern with "the limits of understanding", and since this is a legitimate object of inquiry, it would be foolish to think that every assertion of a general limitation on our understanding is an instance of prison theory. But even when it is not, there remains something odd about many of these doctrines. Consider the ambiguous case of Hegel, for example, who tells us that:

> ". . . every individual is a child of his time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as to fancy that an individual can o'erleap his own age, leap over Rhodes."[12]

Here we have a prison apparently without a key, although Hegel himself certainly thought he could transcend all previous ages. He was not here affirming that particular kind of historical fundamentalism, often used to clip the wings of historians, in which the present is said to be the only epoch we can know, because whenever we try to write the history of past time, we inescapably import the baggage of our own.

Plato's view, oddly enough, does not so much deny this doctrine as consider it irrelevant. Plato's argument would seem to be that the philosopher at least can transcend everything, including his own time, for whatever the temporal point from which he begins his ascent, the place at which he arrives and the divine vision he will enjoy remain exactly the same. Hegel's view, by contrast, would seem to be that even the philosopher is within history, that is, inside the Cave; and this is at least trivially true in the sense that the reality which the philosopher seeks to understand goes on revealing new aspects of itself after any particular philosopher has spoken. Philosophy has no stopping place. Hegel shares Karl Popper's view that you can't cheat the future by having it now.[13]

This, then, is a "temporal impossibility theorem", and like all such theorems it trades on ambiguity. In one sense it is obvious that the philosopher will not be able to know future events; in another, it is clear that the philosopher's tools of abstraction give him a powerful purchase into an indefinite future, and this is why we still find it illuminating to read the philosophers of the past.

The same ambiguity will be found in most other versions of impossibility; nor is the ambiguity less when the exponent retreats to mere improbability. It has been, not implausibly, suggested that none of us can transcend our own social class, or our race, or that there are things that women understand from which men are forever excluded (and vice versa). It will be clear from such examples that prison theories can take either a positive or a negative form. Sometimes our cognitive imprisonment is affirmed directly; at other times it is implied by the attribution of privilege to some other class. That only the members of class *X* can understand such-and-such matters entails that all non-members of the class are lost in ignorance. Some general versions of the prison thesis—such as the idea that we cannot overleap the limitations of our culture—oscillate between improbability and impossibility. The prison of culture has acquired a name of its own: "ethnocentricity".

These are instances of generalised theorems which may cover all knowledge; but no less common are impossibility theorems directed at specific forms of knowledge. No historian, it is said, can escape the political limitations of his time—and this is why history must be rewritten in every generation. Again, the scientist is thought to be entangled inescapably in the assumptions of instrumental rationality, or alternatively, the *Lebenswelt*. The philosopher is sometimes taken as merely the custodian of the set of concepts which sustain the present mode of domination—itself, of course, a prison. As for practice, the life of ordinary people cannot help being ruled by the assumptions of the present moment.

This listing of Cave Theorems merely scratches the surface of a large subject, but it has all been a bit up in the air. Let me try to convey the sheer range of what I am talking about with a few examples.

ONE FUNDAMENTAL TYPE of "inescapability theorem" takes our very human nature to be what we cannot transcend. George Eliot as narrator characterises Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860, Book 7, ch. 3):

> "Tom, like every one of us, was imprisoned within the limits of his own nature, and his education had simply glided over him, leaving a slight deposit of polish. . . ."

And she goes on to add:

> ". . . if you are inclined to be severe on his severity, remember that the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision."

Alternatively, let me take a contemporary argument summarising a controversy about current politics in South Africa:

> "The Whites are shown to be trapped by their past, their upbringing, their religion, even by their nostalgias . . . they are so enmeshed in a system of conventions, traditions,

[12] *Philosophy of Right* (ed. Knox, 1952), Preface, p. 11.

[13] See the argument sketched on pp. v-vi of the preface to Sir Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957). Popper imagines himself to be refuting historicists, including Hegel, with the argument. But since Popper is a notoriously weak expositor of Hegel, perhaps a veil ought to be drawn over the matter.

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economic and psychological controls, that they actually *cannot* change."[14]

These two instances usefully illustrate the tendency for Imprisonment Theory to dehumanise whatever it touches. Tom and the Whites are construed as objects of nature in terms of a subjectivity which understands them from a higher level. They are, in other words, taken to be matter requiring the impress of an idea.

Perhaps these examples seem a little lacking in severe intellectuality. Then we might well take Marx, whose entire *oeuvre* is a history of the modern world as a kind of Dostoevskian prison-nightmare. Better, let me take Jacques Derrida's remark (from *Writing and Difference*, 1978):

> "We can produce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulates of precisely what it seeks to contest."

In other words, in trying to escape the Cave, all we ever achieve is to bump our heads on the stone wall—except, perhaps, Derrida himself, who seems to be close enough to the exit to see what is happening. Michel Foucault's account of the contemporary world is animated by roughly the same assumptions, and faces the same problems of reflexivity as Derrida. Foucault taught us (as one commentator remarked soon after Foucault's recent death) that modern power

> "produces its own truth, a logic of its own necessity, which reigns inside the heads even of those of us who want it to change."[15]

And another critic, facing up to the evident problem here, has remarked:

> "As with so many prisoners, of so many kinds, it is not getting out but wanting out that generates in Foucault a strange and special vision. . . ."[16]

The metaphors, then, run riot: endless prisons, cages, caves, and other forms of incarceration. Yet even when the metaphor isn't being invoked, the doctrine can often be detected in other forms. It appears, for example, in the muddled metaphor of "social control" in legal studies, or in the notion that something called "society" defines and type-casts us for our roles in life. The shades of the prison-house begin to close in upon us when we are told that in some field or another neutrality or objectivity is in principle "impossible", rather than merely difficult to achieve. Such views echo in a negative way the positive enthusiasm for philosophical freedom classically affirmed by Epicurus: "*We must free ourselves from the prison of affairs and politics.*"[17] Nor is this merely a remark about taste and temperament; it is an entire doctrine about the human situation.

FORMALLY, WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH a variety of scepticism; and, as with most forms of scepticism, the practice belies the theory. Consider one common version: that political doctrines are merely "class ideologies"—liberalism, for example, being "the class-determined thought of the bourgeoisie". If so, political thought is like a mechanical secretion; it would be pointless to proselytise. Yet exponents of such a view spend most of their lives in evangelism. They are to be found forever standing on the steps of educational institutions, or outside draughty railway stations, pressing upon us their opinion about the futility of pressing opinions upon us.

In this area—the bargain-basement level of the tradition of classical philosophy, as it were—we are dealing with the common phenomenon of a practice which doesn't properly accord with its theory. But it still remains relevant to consider just what it is that explains this curious mixture of doubt and faith, of scepticism and enthusiasm. My view is that it arises from the popularity of a type of dialectic which has been characterised in its Hegelian form as follows:

> "What one does in dialectic is first to operate at a given level of thought, to accept its basic assumptions, and to go to the limit of its terms, and then to proceed to stand outside of it, to become conscious of it, to become clear as to what it really has achieved, and how far these achievements do or do not square with its actual professions. In dialectic one says what can be said *about* a certain thought-position that one cannot actually say *in* it."[18]

I cite this perfectly sensible account of what it is to be reflective because its very slight element of formalisation allows us to grasp what might be attractive to philosophical enthusiasts about the method. It distinguishes between two *levels* of thought, one of which is characterised by stricter conditionalities than the other. When we act, we clearly take a great deal more for granted than when we reflect. We therefore act at a lower level of thought, and reflect at the higher. This is a situation which irresistibly invites conversion into the classical categories of the wise, who reflect, and the foolish, who merely act. Since we all do act, however, it can agreeably be stated as an imprisoning characteristic of the whole human race, while permitting those who assert it to exclude themselves by the very act of asserting it. For the classic doctrine has it that we become free by recognising the necessities of our condition.

AS A FORM OF ACADEMIC VAUDEVILLE, we may characterise this basic move as intellectual escapology.

"Escapology" was originally an art developed by the son of Hungarian-Jewish immigrants to the United States. He named himself after the great French magician Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin. It is perhaps significant that Robert-Houdin

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[14] Steven Watson, "In the Power Trap", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 August 1985, p. 885.

[15] Michael Ignatieff, *Paragraph*, Vol. 5, March 1985, p. 79.

[16] Clifford Geertz, *New York Review of Books*, 26 January 1987, p. 6.

[17] Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (eds), *History of Political Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 134.

[18] J. N. Findlay, "The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel" in MacIntyre (ed.), *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 4-5.

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once played a part on the stage of politics. In 1856, as one biography has it:

> "the Marabouts, a brand of wonder-working religious fanatics, were urging the tribes to rise up and overthrow the French. In Paris, the government asked Robert-Houdin to go to Algeria and counteract the influence of the Marabouts by an exhibition of his magic. So he performed before the assembled leaders of all the tribes. His magic astounded them and they believed his powers to be supernatural. They took council [sic] among themselves and concluded that the magic of the Marabouts could not be compared to the magic of the French. Peace was restored and Robert-Houdin returned in triumph to Paris. . . ."[19]

The inventor of escapology as vaudeville thus called himself Houdini, and exhibited during his theatrical life, almost as a form of pathology, a passion for escaping from every manner of constraint that could be devised. He began by practising with rope, finding, as his biographer puts it:

> ". . . that it was impossible to tie a man securely with one long length of rope if the tying began at one end and finished at the other, for by expanding the chest or hunching the shoulders slack could be obtained."

The account adds, in words reminiscent of the content of many academic journals: "obtaining slack was the key to any escape." Later, Houdini became fascinated watching the fruitless struggles of a lunatic to free himself from a straitjacket, and he spent agonising days learning how to do so. In the course of a spectacular and ultimately fatal career, he escaped from handcuffs, locked trunks, locked trunks under water or suspended high above the ground, and even (in imitation of Jonah) from "the belly of a whale", or at least a very large and strange monster fish. . . .

I cite Houdini because he seems to me the ultimate in dialecticians. These constraints were all things believed to be ineluctable in the strict sense: things from which one cannot escape by struggling. As we might say, the dialecticians have only interpreted the world: the point is to escape it. The Orphics of the ancient world believed that the body was a prison from which the soul must seek release, and Houdini's career was a kind of Orphic parable. In him one may see the passion for liberation at its purest—because he had no real interest in enjoying his freedom. All he wanted to do was get back into some new prison, or to put on a new set of handcuffs and struggle to work himself loose. He is the ultimate symbol of the kind of philosophical enthusiasm I am concerned with: a pure exponent of liberation, in all its grisly vacuity.

Such, I think, is the underlying impulse behind the philosophical enthusiasm for liberation, and sometimes it surfaces in the intellectual world with nothing less than the full apparatus of Houdinian mechanisms. Consider an argument to the effect that the proletariat is an imprisoned class:

> "The men [symbolising the proletarian class] are placed in a room the only exit from which is a huge and heavy locked door. At various distances from each lies a single heavy key. Whoever picks up this key—and each is physically able with varying degrees of effort to do so—and takes it to the door will find, after considerable self-application, a way to open the door and leave the room. But if he does so he alone will be able to leave it. Photoelectric devices ensure that it will open only just enough to permit one exit. Then it will close, and no one inside the room will be able to open it again. . . ."[20]

Houdini would have loved this situation. He was, indeed, taken up at one stage in his career by Marxists who thought he symbolised the working class escaping from its bondage. But what he really symbolises is a certain style of contemporary intellectual production which vaunts a generalised imprisonment the better to display (or, more commonly, hint at) its escapological skill.

4. *Shadows & the Sun*

HOUDINI'S BONDS were physical: ropes, handcuffs, trunks, straitjackets, and the rest. The cognitive bonds we discover in the Metaphor of the Prison are, evidently, metaphorical: such matters as class, position in historical time, point of view, economic interest, sex, race, language, culture, society, and so on. It is not too much to say that there is no feature of the inner life which cannot be, and has not been, construed as a limitation upon the human spirit, as part of a narrow enclosure from which we must be liberated.

Yet it is only necessary to juxtapose these two lists in order to realise that the analogy fails. The relationship between the rope which binds my wrist and the will which moves my hands is unmistakably one of opposition and limitation—but the relation between me and my culture, or the language I speak, is something else again. Being an English speaker may indeed limit my understanding of what is written in German and merely translated, but at the same time it allows me to communicate within my own linguistic domain. Further, it does not seem to be the case that I would understand better if I were "languageless", freed from the bonds of language, if that were conceivable. A similar argument may be presented in respect of all of the other supposed limitations upon my understanding, and this reveals why the analogy fails. While each of these items may be construed as a bond in some circumstances, it is unmistakably a resource in others.

These items are not merely resources in the conduct of my inner life. To a large extent they actually *constitute* that inner life, which would be unimaginable without it. Take them from me, and what would be left? No doubt one or two may be vestigial. Old blind Tiresias had had the experience of both

[19] Raymond Fitzsimons, *Death and the Magician* (London, 1980), p. 14.

[20] Gerry Cohen, "Capitalism, Freedom and the Proletariat" in Ryan (ed.), *The Idea of Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 22.

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sexes; and some people are referred to as "classless"; but these are matters that depend on context. The point may be put in the Hegelian manner: it is only by advancing into the limitations of sex, class, language, historical moment, and all the rest that "the infinite will" can become actual. My identity is not, of course, exhausted in being an assemblage of these characteristics, but without them I would be inconceivable. For Proteus was a mythical beast, and it is clear that the single, simple, basic principle of liberatory philosophical enthusiasm is that we are imprisoned by the very fact of being whatever we are.

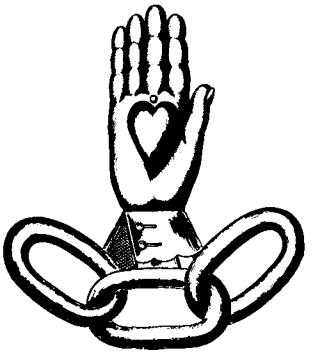
Yet people are both more, and less, cognitively limited than they seem. They are *more* limited because they often do not fully realise what they have said and done; and it is precisely for this reason that our inner life consists essentially in a stream of recognitions and realisations, as things dawn upon us. But people are also *less* limited than they seem because they are always—a point that Proust has turned into high art—more aware of their limitations and of their essential absurdity, than they seem. A human being, in other words, is a creature deploying these limitations or resources within a public world allowing constant access to more universal points of view. And these resources, construed as limitations, set the challenge of life just as (to use St Augustine's metaphor) a poetic form sets the challenge for a poet, and without it a poem would be impossible.

WHAT, THEN, IS the philosophy of the Cave? The one sure thing is that it construes individual striving as a shadowland, and hence the thoughts and acts of individuals as without value. They are *mere* points of view. This judgment is made in terms of the sunlight outside the Cave, in which human life appears as a ceaseless blundering around amid uncertainty. But what is the character of the sunlight which generates this judgment?

Plato had trouble with this question, and perhaps we should not be too hard on the *epigoni* who have failed to improve on him. It is at least clear that the doctrine picks out a contrast between the existing human condition and a liberated state. It is also clear that exponents of the doctrine understand themselves to have taken the first step towards liberation. They thus become what were called Illuminati in the "Secret Societies" of the Enlightenment, and Gnostics, or perfect men, in the early century of Christianity. They are wise rather than foolish, rational and not superstitious, the enlightened who stand above false consciousness. We know that they often claim a right of tutelage over the rest of the human race, seeking to lead them out of the Cave.

Beyond that, all we are likely to get is a few irritable remarks that sufficient-unto-the-day-of-liberation is the knowledge thereof. One notable exponent of this form of enthusiasm did mutter a few words about "hunting . . . fishing . . . literary criticism". But this was in the early days of the revival of the liberatory ideas, before the full implications of the dialectic were realised; hunting and fishing are now excluded by the eco-imperative of liberation in the sentient world. It is forms or universals which cast the sunlight, and there is nothing to be done with them, except contemplation. In these practical terms, the logic of liberation leads—ineluctably—to nihilism.

5. *The Taste for Liberty*



IN CONCENTRATING UPON liberation, I have rather left liberty behind; and perhaps this is as it should be. Liberty belongs to the people, and is for the most part something that we should enjoy unselfconsciously. It is important to understand how we get it, though, and, as my account suggests, we do not get it suddenly. There are no "birth-pangs", no "struggles", and no "revolution" by which liberty can be acquired. Indeed, as the English know, one grows into liberty, over the centuries, by acquiring a taste for it.

The taste in question is one for consorting with independent people rather than people who are servile and dependent; and Anglo-Saxon manners have this taste built into them. Indeed, philosophy (which in one form I have been treating rather roughly in this argument) incorporates the same taste, because it requires attention not to social variations but to the cogency of what people say. Freedom in European societies, then, is something entrenched in the practices of Europeans. It animates their manners, and underlies their moral individualism. Unfortunately, manners can be vulgarised the more they are distilled into ideas, and one common vulgarisation of individuality consists in taking it as cantankerous and disruptive, for such behaviour is a proof of a refusal to conform.

Some individualism is true, some false; and the "false individualism" (as Hayek called it[21]) is actually a form of dependence. This illustrates the way in which ideas are chameleons—they disguise themselves in remarkable ways, and sometimes turn up looking like their opposites. Of no idea is this so true as the idea of liberation.

The tastes and dispositions which constitute freedom are not built overnight; indeed in some cases they cannot be built at all. In confiding his "revolution" to the proletariat, the pure "matter" of politics, Marx notably defied the Western political tradition, which has always been clear on the point that political liberation, as the movement in politics from slavery to freedom, is impossible. Let the point be made, in his usual lucid manner, by Rousseau:

> "Once a people is accustomed to masters, it is no longer in a condition to do without them. If such peoples try to shake off the yoke, they remove themselves even further from liberty; for as they mistake for liberty an unbridled licence which is the opposite of freedom, their revolutions

[21] F. A. Hayek, *Individualism, True and False* (1946).

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almost always deliver them into the hands of seducers who multiply their chains. . . ."[22]

In these terms, Marx might have been mistaken in one of two ways. Seeking a liberatory revolution, and defying the Western tradition, he may have overestimated the capacity of the European proletariat for freedom. Certainly the offer of freedom was, in later times, made to peoples who were wrongly cast as such a proletariat because their culture was one in which the practices of freedom played little part. The result was an exchange of tradition for despotism.

But it might also be the case that Marx was quite wrong in casting the proletariat as a band of slaves, like the Israelites in Egypt, to whom Marx appeared himself as a Moses.[23] And this, I think, was the mistake he in fact made. The workers of Europe, miserable as their condition often was, were in fact already accustoming themselves to the practices of freedom, both individually in their various mobilities and collectively in their institutions. Marx was wrong to cast them as the matter of politics, as if their supposed exclusion from society had purified them of all ideas belonging to the past and present.

The workers themselves did not make the mistake of confusing liberty with "unbridled licence"—an old-fashioned expression on Rousseau's part which, since it might provoke derision in our time, should be translated into its elements. What it means is a condition in which people cannot stand to be blocked or frustrated in any one of their desires. This is the condition which Plato described as "democracy" and which he and others construed as the antechamber to despotism. In this story, the *demos* is conducted into despotism by the figure of the demagogue. Every grand political idea has its demagogic aspect, and the demagogic side of liberty is its appeal to the infantilism of a population—to its impatience with frustration. In our time, the idea of liberation has been the medium by which a democratic rhetoric has been demagogically transformed into a despotic practice.

THERE IS AN ARGUMENT in ethical psychology which parallels the steps of this political practice. It goes like this.

Happiness consists in the satisfaction of desires, and the life we live in a modern society involves us in constant frustration. How then shall we be happy? One way is to create a world in which all desires are satisfied—this is the vision evoked by liberty in its demogogic aspect, and exploited by the demagogic ideologist in his constant attention to frustrations. But, realistically, we know that the satisfaction of all desires is impossible. Some goods are positional and logically scarce, other peoples often do not acquiesce in our plans, and so on. Therefore the secret of happiness lies (as Epicurus taught) in having very few desires; for the fewer the desires, the less the frustration.

Rhetorically, desires can be taken out of the hands of the people by switching attention to needs; for it is only the philosopher who understands our needs. To live in terms of few desires—ideally none—is to incarnate reason. And to live in that manner is the idea of ideologists and revolutionaries, an idea already implicit in their dislike of what they call "false needs". The demagogic aspect of liberatory politics is, thus, the promise of unbridled satisfaction; the reality is that desire must become the creature of community. For there is nothing more certain than that the idea of liberation is incompatible with the pursuit of individual desires.

The deeper rhythm of liberation is the mood which sees the modern world as a wasteland of triviality from which we must be rescued. This is the mood in which individual desires seem like an incessant surge and swell, change a limitless addiction, and the impossibility of discerning any port on the horizon, a cause of despair. Liberation promises, as in Tennyson's "Lotos-Eaters", an end to restlessness, a condition of things confessedly beyond history:

Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;
Oh rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

The poor sometimes find the lure of security irresistible; some can even be induced to offer themselves as the matter of this consummation.

6. *Postscript*

IN AN ARGUMENT such as this, the reader will recognise familiar themes and familiar writers, like faces hidden in a puzzle for children. They range from Michael Oakeshott, Maurice Cranston, and Isaiah Berlin in my own parish, to Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin abroad. All are notably self-conscious interpreters of the tradition of Western political speculation to which anyone who attempts to deal with these problems inescapably belongs.

In geological terms, I imagine the Western political tradition as a mountain range being steadily pushed up through the crust of experience by the convulsions of life. It is a range full of pleasant hills, sunlit valleys, and snowcapped peaks, each affording us some coign of vantage. Those who go mountaineering are rewarded by the sight of things invisible from the ground; hopping from point to point, we are forever refreshed by new vistas.

The exploration of political reality in these terms offers us the only real liberation there can be—a liberation from our own parochialities. It is a liberation that can only happen in thought, for practice does indeed hem us in. To attempt to change the world utterly in terms of an idea is not only an impossibility; those who know freedom will recognise it as the most despotic of impossibilities.

[22] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (ed. Cranston, 1984), p. 558.

[23] Lewis S. Feuer, *Ideology and the Ideologists* (1975).

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Norman Levine

A Maritime Story

WHEN I THINK of Max Bleenden I see him driving a long red car in Fredericton, dressed in grey flannels, a navy blue blazer or (if it was warm) a light purple shirt, and smoking a Gauloise. He looks solid. Broad shoulders, a strong neck, a wide face. His dark wavy hair is brushed back and receding. There is a slightly crooked smile. He wears glasses. The eyes are brown. In public he has the air of a celebrity. People look pleased when they say, "Hello, Dr Bleenden". I can hear him come up the worn steps of the George Hotel, knock on the grey-painted door of my rented rooms. When I open the door he speaks in a rough low voice that has something of Europe in it.

"Can you lend me five dollars? I forgot to go to the bank. I have the gardener coming this morning. And I need to buy some tea and eggs. It's a tradition. I always make breakfast for the gardener."

I would give him the money then make some coffee while he looked around at the way I was living in this hotel with the second-hand furniture, the worn linoleum.

"I envy you", he said. "You live such a simple life. Mine is complicated."

Later, leaving Fredericton, he was driving me to the airport. We were silent. Suddenly he said. "You're going away . . . that's awful . . . I won't have anyone to talk to. There's no one down here."

I came to the Maritimes in 1965 because of Max Bleenden.

He had written to me in England. He said he liked my short stories. Would I like to come to Fredericton and be resident writer. And because we needed the money I said yes. I owed rent for two years. Had a lawyer's letter threatening action from the landlady's son. The landlady was a nice old lady who apologised for this. It only came out when she was sick. Her son happened to see what I owed.

I left wife and children behind—I had no intention of settling in the Maritimes—and flew over at the end of August.

Max Bleenden was to meet me in the lobby of the Beaverbrook Hotel. As he came in he looked around expectantly. But as soon as he saw me he looked disappointed.

"I didn't think you would be so short", he said.

Max was several inches shorter. He drove me to his house—a solid greystone facing the river with a gravel drive, grass on either side, and a heavy front wooden door. Behind the house were tall trees and large gardens of fruit, vegetables, and flowers. Inside, the rooms were high, painted white, and lightly furnished with antique wooden furniture and blue carpets. On the walls were abstract oil paintings, and a photograph of a serious young girl. There were irises, roses, gladioli, in different colours, in glass vases and earthenware pots. There was a glass bowl full of fruit.

His wife came in. She was a bit taller than Max. Thin and shy with red hair. When she smiled she looked like a pretty Tallulah Bankhead. She hardly spoke. If I spoke to her, she smiled back. We sat in the comfortable chairs, in one of the front rooms, looking out at the river, and had tea.

A large elderly woman in grey walked in with sandwiches on a tray. As she went out Max said:

"She is here to look after my mother. My mother's name is Nettie. I want you to meet her."

He led me up the stairs, past three rooms, to a bare white room where a small elderly woman sat in a high-backed chair. Her hands were clutching the armrests. Her feet were not touching the ground. She was dressed in a purple blouse, a black skirt. Around her neck a light silk lemon scarf was tied loosely. Her grey hair was cut short and permed and I could see the pink scalp between curls. She sat by a window and beside a fish tank that had three small fish swimming in it. Max introduced me.

"Who are you?" his mother said in a flat voice.

"I'm Max's friend."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

She looked out of the window at the road, the river, the far shore, the sky.

"I write to Max every week", she said. "Did you know I'm going to Canada?"

She left us again. Went back to the window.

She had an interesting but worn-out face. She must have been pretty for the structure was still there with the prominent cheekbones, the small mouth with the noticeable front teeth as if a smile was never far away.

"I hate this house", she said. "It goes quiet. I don't know where everyone is."

She looked at the tank.

"They are trying to fob me off with fish. I don't want fish. I want people."

She looked at me.

"Suddenly it's quiet", she said. "They don't explain

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things. I don't know where they are. I don't know when they are coming back. They don't ask me if I want to go. They just go away. . . .

"Did you know I'm going to Canada? To the Maritimes. I have a son in the Maritimes."

Max began to walk impatiently up and down. She followed his movements. When he stopped near her she said: "How long am I going to stay here?"

"How long would you like to stay, Mother?", Max said. "For ever?"

"That's not very long", she said.

As I was leaving Max said he and his wife were driving to Boston tomorrow for a short holiday before the academic year started. Would I like to come?

When we got to Boston all Max wanted to see was films. We saw six films in three days. He also wanted to go to a striptease. We went into a dark place where a young girl with long legs performed on a small stage, in the centre of the room, while the customers stood around and watched. A cigarette girl, not young, came by. Max picked up a small cigar, from her tray, and took out a coin from his pocket.

"Can I put a quarter in your box?" he asked with a grin.

"Don't be an ass-hole", the cigarette girl said. "You can't get into my box for a quarter."

She couldn't have known that she was talking to the Dean of a university.

On the drive back from Boston, with his wife asleep, Max told me about himself. He was born in Hamburg. "Both my parents spoke Yiddish. I also spoke Yiddish. But I have long forgotten it." His father was a publisher. They had a comfortable life. When he was thirteen—it was 1933—his mother brought him to London. They didn't see his father again. He went to an English grammar school, then London University. They had little money. His mother did a variety of jobs, whatever she could get. It was while he was at university that his poems began to appear in the little magazines. His reviews in the weeklies. And talks on the BBC. That's when I first heard of him. But we never met. Although I used to go to the same Soho clubs, the same pubs: the French, Joe Lyons, the Mandrake. Max said he played the piano, for a while, at the Colony. And we talked about Muriel Belcher and Francis Bacon. After the War ("My father was a conscientious objector . . . his father was a conscientious objector . . . so I was a conscientious objector. I was sent to work on the land. I was digging ditches. And all I wanted to do was fly a Spitfire") he came to Canada to lecture at a small college in Nova Scotia where he met his wife, the daughter of a General. She inherited money. They moved to Fredericton. "After I married, the writing stopped. The instinct for it had gone. And I haven't written anything since. But I can tell the real thing when I see it. And *boychick*", he slapped my knee, "you have it."

But despite this friendliness I was uncomfortable with Max.

In the first week of term he asked me to meet his creative writing class. There were about twenty students, mostly girls. "Here is our resident writer", Max began. "He writes short stories. They are mostly stories about being hard-up. But look the way he is dressed. He is wearing an expensive English suit, expensive English shoes, an expensive shirt and tie."

I didn't know where to look.

(The thin light-grey suit I bought in a discount house in Truro, Cornwall, for £9. It was made in Bulgaria. My shoes, also cheap, I bought in Exeter. They were made in Romania.)

I also disliked the way he took it for granted that I would just fall in with his plans. He never asked. He just said, "Let's go—", or, "I'll pick you up for a football game at—".

My reaction to this was immediate.

When I was supposed to be at the President's reception to introduce new members I was in the Riverside Room of the Beaverbrook Hotel drinking a beer and reading a thriller.

Next morning he came to my office, three doors away from his. A hurt expression on his face.

"Why weren't you at the President's reception?"

"When was it?"

"Yesterday. I made a speech telling all about you. People clapped. We waited for you to step forward. Nothing happened."

I turned down all invitations.

Max would walk briskly into my office and say: "I just had a phone call from the Rotarians. They have a monthly meeting. The food is very good. They would like you to be their next speaker—"

"I'm busy", I said. "Working."

I wasn't working. I was moving. From the Beaverbrook, that he put me in, to the George which was less than half the price. I was also getting to know Fredericton. The long residential streets with the front lawns and the large wooden houses with verandahs and trees. The short business streets, by the river, with the small stores and Chinese restaurants. But it didn't take long to walk through it. And I had a feeling of isolation, of being cut off.

One morning I walked to the supermarket by the river to get some groceries. When I came out a mild man in glasses, dressed like a farmer, came up to me.

"Have you got education?"

I didn't know what to say.

"Have you got education?"

I thought this was a new way of asking for money.

"Yes", I said hesitantly.

"What is eight at fifty dollars each?"

"Four hundred dollars."

"Four hundred", he said loudly. And repeated it as if he didn't believe it. He walked away delighted.

Another day I went to the Legislative building. I was listening to a debate on fishing from the public gallery when an usher came up to me and whispered:

"Sir, you can't sit like that."

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I had my legs crossed.

"Why not?"

"The members below—they can see."

"I'm wearing trousers."

"It's a rule sir . . . because of the ladies. They'd come here . . . sit like you . . . and from below, with some, you could see the time of day."

On Armistice Day I went to the cenotaph. A service of remembrance was going on. Names of local people killed in the Second World War were being read over a loudspeaker. The voice said.

Graham Budd, Royal Canadian Air Force.
Robert Pichette, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals.
Jim Smith, Royal Canadian Air Force.

Brought to you by Frank's Fast Foods. . . .

Tommy Symons, Royal Canadian Navy.
Fred Towers, Royal Canadian Engineers.

Brought to you by Dominion Supermarket. . . .

I wasn't sleeping well. At first light I'd walk to the river to see the trees in their autumn colours, the solitary white house on the far shore, reflected in the water. After breakfast, I'd go out again, buy a paper. Then to the Post Office to see if there were any letters from my wife. I wrote three times, sometimes more, a week (as she did) telling her I missed her. That I disliked being here. And couldn't wait to get back. Meanwhile I was going to earn as much money as I could.

With this in mind I walked to the newspaper building in the Square. And was shown into the owner's empty office. The owner walked in. Small stubby brown shoes with thick heels and thick soles and rounded tops. A black eye-patch over his right eye. He was about five foot ten. He had a small moustache, thin dark hair, and spoke in a clipped English voice. He was referred to as the Brigadier. And told me he was a friend of Beaverbrook, knew the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and, for my benefit, he talked about Arnold Bennett. He said that when Arnold Bennett reviewed a book in the *Evening Standard* the book would sell out. He would give me a page, in his monthly magazine for the Maritimes, and he expected me to do the same as Arnold Bennett.

But the books I wanted were published in London. And often they didn't want to send review copies to a Maritime monthly they hadn't heard of. The Brigadier was furious. I saw him pick up the phone, in a rage, and shout to the London publisher demanding a copy. Sometimes it worked.

I did articles on an anthology of short stories, a novel by Graham Greene, books on Hemingway, Babel, Chekhov, and an anthology of the Second World War. I also had some of my stories reprinted. From this I earned an extra five hundred dollars a month.

It was by doing this work that I met the journalists who worked for the Brigadier. They were young Englishmen, from English public schools, that the Brigadier brought over. Their calling cards said *Gentlemen of the Farm*. They lived in a run-down rented farm across the river. In the city they wore suits, ties, clean shirts. I expected a rolled umbrella, a bowler hat. And when they played cricket or soccer, against the university or the Army Camp, their sports clothes were immaculate. But on the farm—they only had chickens—they wore worn-out shabby clothes. They went around unshaven, uncombed. The rooms had disorder and chicken shit. The kitchen looked as if no one had washed-up for months or put the garbage out. . . .

When I went for my early evening drink to the Beaverbrook, I would join these neatly dressed journalists and listen as they joked, discussed life and the world situation.

With them, sometimes, was Marcel, a French Canadian from Moncton. He was in computers. He drove a green MG. He was convinced that I was getting the wrong impression of the Maritimes by mixing too much with intellectuals and people with money. So he took me to various beer parlours. Then, to the outskirts, off the highway, and on to a dirt road, to a string of unpainted wooden shacks spaced far apart. Smoke came from a tin chimney. No one was outside.

Marcel then drove to an Indian reservation. The same signs of poverty and hopelessness. As if everyone inside was lying fully-dressed on a bed, not sleeping, in the middle of the afternoon.

"I don't read books", Marcel said on the drive back, "but I'll read one of yours. If I like it—I'll buy it."

Max came to the George.

"Have you been avoiding me? It's over two weeks since I've seen you."

"I haven't", I said.

"Come for a ride."

Then he said: "Let's go back to my place for a drink. I'm depressed."

When we got out of the car instead of going into the house he went around it. We cast long shadows on the grass. He led me to the trees. And, among them, to a wooden hut. He unlocked the door.

Inside it was spartan. A plain wooden table. An ordinary wooden chair. Used books on planks of wood held up by bricks. An open fireplace with sawn wood stacked beside it. There were picture-postcards stuck on the walls of paintings by Rembrandt, Monet, Pissarro, Chagall, Bonnard. A small sink, a single tap, an electric kettle. Empty jars of instant coffee, packs of Gauloises and matches. A bottle of Remy Martin was by a small radio. A used upright piano by a wall. Beside another, a couch was made up as a bed.

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"I feel at home here", Max said. "The house . . . that's my wife's place. This is mine." He indicated the books, the faded poster of *The Threepenny Opera* on a wall, the faded magazines.

I looked at the books. I knew them. They were English books of the late 1940s and 1950s. He showed me magazines with his poems, his reviews.

"That was my time", Max said. "Who knows what I would have done had I stayed in Europe. But I'm here. And, *boychick*, most of the time I like it."

He showed me letters he had from T. S. Eliot, Picasso. And, from another folder, he brought out obituaries that he had cut from *The Times*. They were of writers, painters, editors of little magazines, who were known just after the War and who died young. They were people I also knew.

"That's why we get on", Max said. "We have the same references."

The only sign of luxury was a large window looking out to the trees and gardens. "I come here when I can", Max said. "In the morning the dew is on the grass . . . the birds have started . . . the flowers are at their best . . . I read, I smoke, I have a drink. I listen to the BBC overseas service for the news . . . I play the piano . . . I day-dream. It's my bolt-hole. Then I go to work."

He poured Remy Martin into the cracked cups. He sat on the couch. I on the wooden chair. He lit up a Gauloise.

"I read the same books again and again", Max said. "Now that I don't write—I copy out things that I like." He opened a thick notebook, turned some pages, and read aloud.

"'The heart—it's worth less than people think. It's quite accommodating, it accepts anything. It's not particular. But the body—that's different—it has a cultivated taste—it knows what it wants.'"

"You know who said that?"

"No."

"Colette." He turned more pages. Read out: "to exist is enough." Then turned to the last page of the notebook, showed it to me. The only thing on it was: "The final unimportance of human life."

"Who said that?"

"I don't know", Max said. "I didn't. But when I read it—I don't feel so bad."

He put out a Gauloise, lit another.

"I'll miss Fredericton—"

"When are you leaving?"

"When I'm 65, I'll retire to England. Somewhere in the country. Not too far from London."

"And your wife?"

"She won't want to come. But when the time comes she'll go. As you see, my wife and I don't talk much. Not now. We keep certain thoughts to ourselves."

We finished the brandy in the cups. He locked the door. We were walking to the house when his wife came quickly towards us.

"Nettie's escaped."

"When?"

"I don't know. I went into her room. And she wasn't there."

"I'll use the car", Max said. "You", he said to his wife, "look in the restaurants, the library, the stores."

"I'll look for her", I said.

"Fine. Do the side-streets and by the river."

"What was she wearing?"

"A pink sweater", his wife said, "grey skirt and slippers."

I walked and looked for over an hour and a half. No sign of Nettie. I phoned up Max, from a call-box, wondering if she was still alive.

"The police have her", he said calmly. "I'm going just now to the station to pick her up. She was trying to get on a bus. She had no money. She told them she was going to Canada."

"Has this happened before?"

"Yes", he said.

TWO WEEKS LATER it was a different Max who came to the George. He had come back from a three-day conference in Calgary. And he talked non-stop about women. "It's all in the angle of penetration. . . . If they have large bums . . . it's better to use a pillow. I picked up a professor at the hotel bar . . . about 35 or 36 . . . a medievalist. . . . I asked her to spend the night with me. She said she would if I promised I wouldn't do anything."

"What happened?"

He looked surprised. "Nothing happened. I gave her my word."

That night he picked me up for the annual party of his creative writing class. The parents, he said, were away. "We'll enjoy ourselves." There were drinks, music, food. Max was the first one to start dancing. Then spent the rest of the evening, in a dark corner, with the girl who was giving the party. When he drove me back to the George he was like an adolescent. "Now you see why I have these creative writing classes."

"Better wipe the lipstick off before you go in the house."

Next morning he walked into my office. He was excited.

"I needed a new secretary", he said. "They sent me one. But I'll have to let her go. I couldn't work with her."

"Why not?"

"Too sexy. Come, I'll show you."

He led me down the corridor to the main office. And introduced me to this young tall girl who was smiling. She looked like girls I saw in the street. Blonde short hair, healthy, outdoor type, in a tight sweater and a tight skirt.

"Turn around", Max said.

And she did, as if she was a fashion model, still smiling.

"How could I work standing close to her?"

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"She probably needs the job", I said.

"She'll go back to the typing pool. Alone with her . . . I wouldn't trust myself."

I liked Max better when the macho side of him was absent. One afternoon he picked me up and drove by the river into the country for about an hour. "I make this trip about once every six or seven weeks", he said. "My wife goes more often. We have a daughter. She lives by herself, a solitary. She's a lovely girl, 24, you'll see."

We went down a dirt track. There was a wooden shack with asbestos on the outside and on the roof. In a clearing, a small vegetable garden and some flowers. A brown dog came out and a black and ginger kitten. The dog barked. A voice said.

"What is it, Fred?"

Then Max's daughter came out of the shack. She was tall and slim and she looked like one of those Pre-Raphaelite paintings. She ran over and kissed Max.

"Hello, Dad."

He introduced me. She looked a bit shy. She spoke softly. She brought us inside . . . made some coffee.

There were different herbs . . . books to do with the psyche . . . Buddhism . . . happiness . . . there were plants growing in small pots . . . lots of paperback books . . . and postcards put up. . . .

I went out to leave them alone.

We stayed about an hour.

Max didn't talk much on the drive back. "Every time I come back from seeing her I feel sad. And there is nothing I can do."

Before driving to the airport, I went with Max to see Nettie in her room. I told her I was leaving. But she took no notice. Max had bought her a colour television for her 70th birthday. She was watching a train going across the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It was a travelogue showing the different provinces in the autumn.

When it was over Nettie was silent.

Then she said to Max:

"Why did you keep that country all to yourself?"

I returned to England, to my wife and kids, paid off the debts. Had a three week holiday with the family in London. And there was enough money left for the next nine months. I began to write.

All the time I was in Fredericton, I thought I hated it. But bits and pieces began to appear in my next novel and in several short stories.

Max and I wrote regularly. He always included small details that I suspect he thought I might be able to use.

> ". . . on a freezing night our mayor was pushed out of a moving car on the main street at three in the morning. He was pushed out by a lady who wasn't his wife. He was in the nude. . . . They tried to burn the George down twice since you left . . . both times the fire-engines arrived too soon. . . . The Brigadier died while on holiday in the Bahamas. . . . The Gentlemen of the Farm gave a farewell party . . . they are leaving for British Columbia. Sometime after midnight we went out of the farmhouse and there was a large wooden cross burning fiercely. Someone said: Ku Klux Klan. Someone else said: This is New Brunswick. . . ."

At Christmas he sent £5 to each of our daughters.

The following summer he and his wife came to see us. They were travelling through the South-West in a rented car. In St Ives they stayed in the best hotel, the Tregenna Castle. Max took us there for a meal. As we entered, and saw the glass chandeliers, he said.

"Ribbentrop was promised this hotel for his residence by Hitler after he conquered England."

Next day it rained. They stayed with us in the house. Max played ping-pong with the children. Then records. *Hair* was in fashion. Max played it over and over. He twisted to the music, he sang the songs, he liked the naughty words ("Mummy, Mummy, what is fellatio?"). He tried to get my wife to dance on the table.

That is how I remembered him on that cool September morning when I heard that he and his wife were killed when their car went off the highway.

Later that day I wrote his obituary for *The Times*.

I CAME AGAIN to Fredericton, eighteen years later, this summer, to give a lecture. I stayed at the Beaverbrook. After a good breakfast, by a window facing the river, I went for a walk. I walked along the main street and to the side-street where the George was. It was burned out . . . gutted. Planks of charred wood were hanging precariously. And where I had my rooms I could see blue sky.

Wherever I walked I kept remembering Max. And things that happened. But for some reason I couldn't find my way to the university. I asked a woman on the opposite side of the street. She said she was going part of the way. She told me she came from Ontario, from Hamilton. And couldn't wait to get back. They had another year here—until their only daughter finished school.

"This is failure city", she said.

I walked up the slope, by the trees and the grass of the university. They named a new building after him —Max Bleenden Hall—a girls' residence. And on the quarter hour the clock, above its entrance, has a delicate chime.

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Three Poems by Zbigniew Herbert

The Fable About a Nail

For lack of a nail the kingdom has fallen
—according to the wisdom of nursery schools—but in our kingdom
there have been no nails for a long time there aren't and won't be
either the small ones for hanging a picture
on a wall or large ones for closing a coffin

but despite this or maybe because of it
the kingdom persists and is even admired by others
how can one live without a nail paper or string
bricks oxygen freedom and whatever else
obviously one can since the kingdom lasts and lasts

people live in homes in our country not in caves
factories smoke on the steppe a train runs through the tundra
and a ship bleats on the cold ocean
there is an army and police an official seal hymn and flag
in appearance everything like anywhere in the world

but only in appearance for our kingdom
is not a creation of nature or a human creation
seemingly permanent built on the bones of mammoths
in reality it is weak as if brought to a stop
between act and thought being and nonbeing

what is real—a leaf and a stone—falls
but spectres live long obstinately despite
the rising and setting of the sun revolutions of heavenly bodies
on the shamed earth fall the tears of objects

Blackthorn

In spite of the worst forecasts of the diviners of weather
—a wide wedge of polar air sunk to its hilt in sky—
in spite of the instinct for life of the sacred strategy for survival
—other plants deliberately gather strength for a leap
and mass buds on the black front lines before attack—
before Prospero raises his hand
the blackthorn begins its solo concert
in the cold empty hall

this wayside shrub shatters
the conspiracy of the cautious
and it is
like handsome young volunteers
who fall on the first day of war in brand-new uniforms
soles of their shoes barely written on by sand
like stars of poetry extinguished too early
like a field trip of children swept away by an avalanche
like those who see clearly in darkness
like insurgents who against the clocks of history
against the worst predictions
despite everything they begin

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o madness of naive white blooms
blinding blizzard
crest of a wave
an aubade with a short stubborn ostinato
halo with no head

yes blackthorn
a few measures
in an empty hall
and then torn musical notes
lie among puddles and rusty weeds
so no one remembers

someone however must have courage
someone must begin

yes blackthorn
a few clear measures
it is a lot
it is everything

Small Heart

for Jan Józef Szczepański

The bullet that I shot
at the time of the great war
made a circle around the globe
and struck me in the back

at the most unsuitable moment
when I was already sure
I had forgotten everything
his=my faults

after all just like others
I wanted to erase from memory
the faces of hatred

history consoled me
that I had fought with naked force
and the Book said
—it is he who is Cain

so many years patiently
so many years in vain

with water of compassion I washed away
soot blood insults
so nobility
the beauty of existence
and perhaps even goodness
could have a home in me

after all just like everyone
I longed to return
to the bay of childhood
to the land of innocence

the bullet I shot
from a small calibre weapon
circled the globe
against the laws of gravitation
and struck me in the back
as if it wanted to say
—that nothing will be forgiven
to anyone

so now I sit alone
on the cut stump of a tree
exactly in the centre
of the forgotten battle

and I
gray spider
weave bitter meditations

about too great a memory
about too small a heart

Translated from the Polish by
John Carpenter and Bogdana Carpenter

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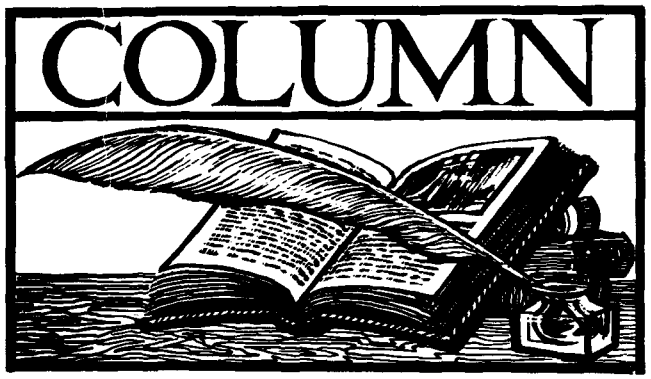

IT'S NEARLY A YEAR since this column looked at newspapers. Then, Britain's new serious daily, *The Independent*, was only a gleam in its future editor's eye, and deck-chair critics were vociferous with ill-informed advice. My own, like everyone's, reflected personal tastes and blind spots: more fun, more explanation, fewer words. . . . Still, allowing for subjectivity, it may be worth while to look back at some of the hopes the new paper aroused, and see how well it's fulfilled them. Take this, then, as a tentative half-term report on *The Independent*, beginning as before with Necessary Evils, Bugbears, and Requests, and ending with a housemaster's assessment of how the newcomer's settling in.

Necessary Evils are self-explanatory. My original list of them began with:

1. *Sport.* Kipling's cookbook phrase about funnelled fools and muddied *oeufs* always struck me as excessive, like Wilde's about the uneatable: but most sports-writing is high on the Richter scale of seismic yawns. Well—surprise, surprise. *The Independent*'s sports-writers know their business, even if it involves medical expertise about Bobby Robson's "large and ugly blood blister", Hoddle's "groin problem", Waddle's "sore thigh", and Mabbutt's rib. Cricket correspondents spin bouncing puns; so do sub-editors' headlines. Neat colour is in: clichés are out. The prose is spare and observant. I'm expecting a semi-colon any day now.

2. *Stock market prices.* Oh dear yes, as E. M. Forster said in another context: but within reason. On business news in general, *The Times* still has the edge—largely because it provides more space. If you want to read about boardroom changes, *The Independent* may disappoint you: if you don't, it's a blessed relief. Personally, too, I prefer economic news stories to be treated on their merits, not segregated in a ghetto of gold and greed.

3. *Crosswords, bridge, chess, etc.* It takes time to learn the code of a crossword-setter; and my first attempts at "The Independent Crossword" (are others in someone's pay?) have been baffling failures. Nor do I tackle chess or bridge problems. These, therefore, remain for me dead space in the paper—duller even than advertisements.

4. *Recent Appointments.* Here the new paper really scores: it omits them. Seekers of spurious glory must go elsewhere.

5. *Full-page advertisements.* I'm sure *The Independent* would like more of them. Altruistically, I wish it well—preferably printing them as a double-page spread, so that readers can ignore both.

Turning to Bugbears, there's even less to complain about.

1. *Country Supplements.* I've yet to find in *The Independent* that national counterpart to vanity publishing: but on this, as on straight advertisements, the paper's money men may have views opposite to mine. Nor can I be so sanguine about:

2. *Travel Sections.* These, with the attendant publicity, are weekly features. Sometimes, they're even amusing. Even so, it's hard to suppress a sense of weary recognition as familiar destinations parade before us. What's the point of travel? If it's only sunshine and mild exoticism, all well and good. But I've always hankered after mystery and danger. There's not much sign of them here.

3. *Motoring, New Products, etc.* Some still respected newspapers have lately taken to printing PR handouts, more or less unchanged, in the guise of genuine stories. This, I'm delighted to see, *The Independent* has shunned. Long may it resist such instant pabulum, concocted by failed journalists on twice the salary.

4. *In-Depth Investigations.* Despite its large format, *The Independent* seems to favour concision, not verbosity. Hence its airy margins and generally relaxed look. No stories are written in repetitive triptychs—promising a revelation, making it, then repeating how important it was. Most carry a single byline, not a gaggle of names. A probe is a good report spoiled by a committee.

5. *Lack of Information.* Foreign news is still a problem here. Some overseas reporting alertly reminds the reader which country it's talking about by including the name in the lead, under the puzzling dateline. But, in even *The Independent*, not every correspondent is so kind. Perhaps it's a house rule that gets forgotten. *I* know where I am—I had to get a visa and fly here: surely everyone knows. Up to a point, Mr Boot. . . .

6. *Moralising Editorials.* These, it seems, are *le vice anglais*. It would take a Counter-Reformation to get rid of them. Even participants in radio phone-ins, ignorant as babes-in-arms, claim "everyone's a right to his opinion" on matters a lifetime's study can't resolve. So C. P. Scott's pre-structuralist dichotomy still rules the centre pages. Facts (from the wire services) are free, but comment is sacred. However, its tone in *The Independent* is cooler than in *The Times*.

7. *Pussyfooting.* Full marks, here, to the new paper. On three issues, its editor and staff have shown outstanding courage. First, they've treated the Parliamentary Lobby with the disdain it deserves. Secondly, they've fought legal battles to avoid disclosing sources unless and until good cause is shown. Thirdly, and most notably, they've defied the British Government's efforts to close the stable door of the Security Service after the horse has defected.

THIS MAY NEED a reminder. Peter Wright, a former MI5 agent now living outside British courts' jurisdiction, broke his implicit contract of service by writing a book alleging various improprieties, including treason. The Government, unable to punish him directly, sued in an Australian court to suppress the manuscript. Meanwhile, two British newspapers, *The Observer* and *The Guardian*, summarised part of Wright's allegations. The Government promptly invoked the law—and

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forbade them to reprint *what they had already published*. The *KGB*, it has to be presumed, has no access to back numbers—any more than it can read, in the Dublin edition, some flimsy memoirs by a former secretary, since deceased, which are still banned in Britain.

In these Gilbertian, Marx Brothers, Monty Python circumstances, *The Independent* blew a little more of the gaff. Now, with other papers which copied it—including *The Washington Post*—it's being pursued through the legal system as if by scarlet-faced bewigged dignitaries chorusing "*Nohow! Contrariwise! It's a secret!*" From whom? For *KGB*, we should perhaps read GBP, or Great British Public. No wonder there are calls for a proper inquiry into whether Peter Wright is wrong. In its own defence, *The Independent* will presumably plead "the public interest". Friends of freedom everywhere must hope it wins.

8. *Reviews of Pop Music and TV*. Once again, alas, these seem to be inescapable. With space at a premium, they seldom earn their keep. Only now and then, when a TV article tackles a wider issue than its verdict on the programme, is there much real point in such retrospective clucking.

So, on Bugbears, the score is favourable but mixed. On Requests it's better.

1. *Bulletin-style news*. This has become an *Independent* speciality, with not only a front-page "Summary" and several "In Brief" columns, but also a weekly feature on forthcoming world events.

2. *Explanation*. In addition to radio-style reports on the lines of "Eight IRA men were killed: their condition is described as satisfactory", *The Independent* is fairly good at disentangling mysterious initials, warring factions, and far-away conflicts. So far, it's been less helpful in analysing obscure political imbroglios; but perhaps that will come.

3. *Background Updates*. Bravo again: the paper runs regular items of this kind, and even calls them "Update".

4. *Tricks of the Trade*. See *Pussyfooting*, above.

5. *Scandals*. Ditto.

6. *A Right of Reply*. Informally, this is the Letters column. Its variety and interest now easily rival those of its counterpart in *The Times*. The only difficulty seems to be that "Disgraceful! Take a letter to *The Independent*!" still doesn't sound quite crisp enough.

7. *Reader Services*. Well, all right: perhaps I was trailing my coat in suggesting a Lonelyhearts feature; but I'd still welcome a tax advice column, a legal section on citizen's rights, and a breakdown of industrial conglomerates. But the entertainments listings are admirable; and by luring Miles Kington away from *The Times*, *The Independent* has indeed acquired both a joker and an ace. It may take him time to feel his audience: his old "Moreover" column had the advantage of a name. But *The Times* is a sadder place without him. None of the surrogates so far has the touch.

So, although still a newcomer, *The Independent* is performing well. "Could do better"? Yes, but so could everyone. "Could try harder"? Please don't. If there's any overall behaviour problem, it's probably sobriety. The writing, like the look of the page, is smooth but lacks passion: it's almost Swedish—a clean, well-lighted place. More edge and attack, in layout as in content, might make it a more urgent read. There's an awful warning to be gleaned from the failure of the Left-wing *News on Sunday*, which advertised itself as non-racist, non-sexist, and so on, contrasting its virtues with a spoof rival it called *The Sunday Smut*—printed on a lavatory roll, and splashing revelations about kinky vicars and vice. Far too many frivolous citizens, it seems, actually preferred the *Smut*.

The Independent needs no Page 3 toplessness: but if, *per impossibile*, it ever did decide to say Thanks for the Mammary, the results would have 3-D vividness. *All* its photographs are far sharper and clearer than those of its rivals—whether because of its paper or on account of the printing process I can't judge. One turns to it as to a photogravure magazine, expecting and finding visual art. Even the sports pictures benefit from sparkling flannels and designer mud.

The paper's other great asset is its arts section, captained by Thomas Sutcliffe, formerly editor of *Kaleidoscope* on the BBC's Radio-4. Running a team of producers, mostly older than himself, on a nightly arts programme, may not have been Sutcliffe's forte. Putting together a daily page of reviews and feature articles, with youngish and hand-picked contributors, he seems to have come into his own. Most notable for their wit and pungency are the *daily* book reviews on the op. ed. page—a feature which competitors might copy.

Are there no complaints? Very few. Some critics have said that the political columnist, Peter Jenkins, is less trenchant here than he was on *The Guardian*; my own view is that the context makes him seem so: a jewel shines brightest in a matt setting. Others have criticised the thoughtful contributions of Sir William Rees-Mogg, former *Times* editor and now supremo of the Arts Council. My own particular *bête noire* is a Saturday feature entitled "Country Matters". Leaving aside the lewd Shakespearian pun, this gives free rein to its author Duff Hart-Davis, who seems to combine love of the countryside with willingness to kill its non-human inhabitants—just the sort of traditional paradox one might have expected *The Independent* to pick apart.

In my own house, then, the newcomer is settling down well. Initially, of course, there was a sense of strangeness. One grows attached to the features one sees at the breakfast table. When *The Times* was on strike or locked out, some years ago, *The Guardian* seemed messy and *The Daily Telegraph* antique. Both have changed since then; and so has *The Times*. Today, alongside its young rival, it still has assets—familiar layout, Bernard Levin, some of the letters, fairly good foreign news. But *The Independent* is nudging it. Long hooked on Printing House Square, I can't quite grow accustomed to the product of Wapping; and the *Times* gossip column, no longer signed PHS, isn't a patch on *The Independent*'s brilliant Francis Wheen. At present, I find myself

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taking both morning papers—a luxury in time as much as money. Increasingly, I turn first to *The Independent*. Shall I, one day, drop *The Times*?

Not, I'm afraid, as long as it runs its up-market bingo game, "Portfolio". I know the odds against winning; I know the time it takes every morning; I know that the reward diminishes, through inflation, month by month. I don't much relish the prospect of having my name and profession bruited abroad if ever I win. But I do enjoy a flutter—particularly when it costs me no more than I've spent already. I'm not a faithful reader. In the last analysis, I must be avaricious.

So, shameful though it sounds, I have to add to my Request List. Will *The Independent* please start its own lottery? It might base the game on Proportional Representation and the Single Transferable Vote.

M

Breathless

Parasols in a warm piazza,
Glazed in our shopping arcade's embrace
And basking under a neon sun
On garden furniture leave no space
In a weatherless latitude for
Grails in my imagination.

The barmaid in the restored freshness
Of my local, whose interior,
Once 15th-century, is reborn
Now as airconditioned mock Tudor,
Shows a flagging cosmetic *jeunesse*
That matches my own long-faded dawn.

Looking at the past, I wonder why,
Given its pending incipience,
Unless it's to find a replica
Of that lost choirboy "innocence"
I feel when viewing a church, caught by
Nostalgia for nostalgia.

A voyeur in Country Parks, I watch
Lovers in information centres
Seeing films of real-life goings-on
Outside: matings, births, placentas,
Ted Hughes-like chores and then a quick touch
Up a stuffed sheep before driving home.

It seems the *patrie* has made its bow
And become one huge mined museum
Of pensioned looms and lathes, serving teas
In tricked-out wharfs and works, laudanum
For labour lost, if not love, and now
Industry's light, micro, Japanese.

My rock face is a brick climbing wall,
And the view from the nylon ski-slope
Of redundant slag and a cement
Factory generates the fond hope
That I might get away from it all
In our first natural element.

En route I note with trepidation
That everybody is milling
Round disinfected pools near the quays,
Or they're in holiday camps, drilling,
While I stare at the sheen-stained ocean,
Breathless as in those posh art movies.

R. N. Allan

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NOTES & TOPICS

Paris Notebook

By Jean-François Revel

The Party Line is Dead

TWENTY OR THIRTY years ago, say around 1955, the French Communist Party could lay claim—either as members or as *sympathisants*—to a whole host of the greatest names in French literature, the sciences, and the arts. In particular, it had successfully saddled them with its own views—Socialist Realism; biological aberrations in the Lysenko vein; Dialectical Materialism; and belief in the sheer superiority of the Soviet system. Mme Verdès-Leroux has described this golden age of Communist culture in the West in a previous book, *Au service du parti* (1983).

Today the Party has been deserted by intellectuals, and its cultural influence is merely vestigial. Marxism itself, appearing to many as "the greatest phantasmagoria of our era" (Leszek Kolakowski), is discredited. How is it that things have moved from that glorious first phase towards the present iron age? That is the process described and analysed in *Le Réveil des somnambules*, the story of the disintegration of Communist culture between 1956 and 1986.[1]

A whole world is recreated here, with its own ways of thinking and feeling; its pretence and despair; its dramas, kinships, idiosyncrasies, taboos and superstitions; its mental universe and its collectivised outlook on the external world. What lesson can be drawn? That human beings—no matter how intellectual, no matter how immensely intelligent—can convince themselves of just about anything; that they can accept and even insist upon the abdication of the mind. The position is encapsulated by a remark made by Frédéric Joliot-Curie (a Nobel prize-winner for physics) in 1951:

> *"Placé au centre même des luttes, disposant grâce à ses militants d'une information complète, et armé de la théorie du marxisme, le parti ne peut manquer de savoir mieux que chacun d'entre nous."*

("Placed at the very centre of the struggles, having at its disposal, thanks to its militants, full information, and armed with the theory of Marxism, the Party cannot fail to know better than any single one among us.")

In 1956 Khrushchev's 20th Congress "secret speech" on the crimes of Stalin gave the intellectuals the first push along the road of doubt and rebellion. It was a path that led to conflicts with the leadership, to uneasy compromises and attempts to "change the Party from within", and to the realisation by some people that there was no option but to fight from the outside. Thirty years of convulsions, false revivals and disintegration, ending with a disastrous heart-and-brain scan in 1986. The road is signposted with its *causes célèbres* of friction and dissension—the Boris Pasternak affair; the case of Solzhenitsyn; the crushing of the Prague Spring; the metamorphosis of the Soviet Union from a "workers' paradise" to a cautionary tale; the derisory episode of "Euro-Communism"; the split of the *Union de la Gauche* in 1977 and the almost self-willed defeat in the 1978 elections; the invasion of Afghanistan; the military dictatorship in Poland. Finally, after 1981, the relegation of the Communist Party to the electoral second division, its marginalisation and probable reduction to the state of *groupuscule*.

DURING THIS PERIOD, the intellectuals seethed with debate and rebellion, and tried hard to devise the criteria for a cultural life compatible with Party membership—but the leadership stood fast. Despite a few ephemeral signs of apparent tolerance, it stuck by the principle that in the end any member of the Party, intellectual or not, must either submit or resign. The courage of Pierre Daix and some of the wilder moods of Louis Aragon led to *Lettres françaises* making a few departures from the official line (particularly over the Prague Spring). That set the rejection mechanism in motion, and led in the end to the suppression of the famous weekly.

Jean Elleinstein worked out an interpretation of the "*phénomène Stalinien*" which he did his utmost to render both acceptable to the Party and receivable by serious non-Party historians; but he could not face both ways for long, and eventually (together with Pierre Daix) he came to terms with himself at the cost of quitting the Party. For there are some intellectual stands which appear "audacious" only in the context of Communist culture and the interdicts pronounced inside its ersatz universe. Measured by the general standard of broader cultural life, such boldness may seem merely commonplace—I recall that in 1963 a book by Roger Garaudy and a campaign in the monthly *La Nouvelle Critique* set out to "rehabilitate" Kafka (who had previously been on the Index within the Party-line milieu).

That was all very well, but the belated eulogy was news only to its authors and their readers, prisoners of their ideological censorship; to the living culture, it was simply a hoary platitude. Similarly, when (after the electoral defeat of March 1978) Louis Althusser published three resounding articles in *Le Monde*, under the title "What Cannot Go On Any Longer in the French Communist Party", it was a non-event except for the fact that the articles were signed by a Communist philosopher. In themselves, they were very old-hat: Alt-

[1] *Le Réveil des somnambules*. By JEANNINE VERDÈS-LEROUX. Fayard-Minuit.

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husser's critique of authoritarian petrification and intellectual obsolescence in the Party had long been taken for granted by every non-Communist observer.

The success of Louis Althusser (analysed at length and with perception by Jeannine Verdès-Leroux) can undoubtedly be traced in part to his managing to make his voice heard inside both cultures at once: in the Communist Party and in the outside world.[2] On the one hand, he could be called "an anti-Stalinist" because he upheld the autonomy of the *penseur* in relation to the Party and its leaders. But, on the other hand, he never categorically rejected Stalinism. He reproached the French CP for its weakness for the petit-bourgeois "humanism" of Roger Garaudy. In Althusser's eyes, Stalin had committed only one crime: his fondness for "*économisme*"—a bourgeois value!

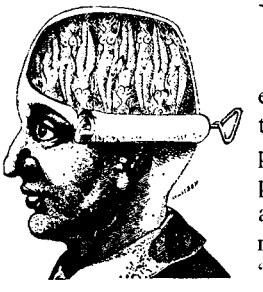
By translating Marx into the language of Jacques Lacan, the author of *Lire "Le Capital"* took Marxist culture out of its formaldehyde only to immerse it in the ideas and ways of speaking *en vogue* in the 1960s. But he broke the chains on Marxism even more radically by a means whose scope is greater than Mme Verdès-Leroux appears to have perceived. Louis Althusser's originality lay in the claim that *Capital* must be read not as a book of economics but as an autonomous philosophical "discourse", a phenomenon of language, with no external reference. At a stroke, he freed Marxists from what had been their greatest burden: the clash between the received doctrine and the harsh facts, the lie given to Marxist theory by the actual course of history, the power exercised over the pure dogma by the detailed data of economics and sociology. Althusser, therefore, pleased everyone except, once again, the blind; or, rather, those whose cultural blindfold he strove in vain to remove: the Party's hard-headed leaders.

AT THE END of her monumental and fascinating investigation, Jeannine Verdès-Leroux records the utter failure of 30 years' efforts on the part of certain Communist intellectuals to win the right to *la liberté de l'esprit* without betraying their political options. Hence the extinction of all original thinking within the framework of the Party. Certainly, there were still arguments, as there are at the present moment. But the malcontents who call themselves "*rénovateurs*" in fact produce very little renewal in Marxist intellectual life. Their thinking is as archaic—and their language as wooden—as that of the leaders they criticise.

Nevertheless, while it is true that the direct cultural influence of the Communists is dwindling to zero, their indirect influence remains, I believe considerable. The Leninist reflexes have often become internalised by non-Communist intellectuals, who follow them without even being aware of it. Thus, what emerges from most French TV reporting on Nicaragua is that once a régime is Communist, it is no longer required to hold free elections in order to be legitimate. On Viet Nam, I saw a TF1 broadcast (on 3 March 1987) in which, having admitted economic failures too glaring to conceal, they were explained in terms of damage inflicted by a war which had ended in 1975, and by the old parrot-cry of "imperialist encirclement", which for 70 years now has served as the excuse for all bankrupt collectivist economies. As for "the Boat People", if they fled it was mainly *le faute des capitalistes*! Put forward in *L'Humanité*, these subterfuges fool hardly anybody; coming from the apparent neutrality of television they can find an impressionable audience. When Régis Debray said in 1979 that the word "Gulag" is "*imposé par l'impérialisme*" (meaning the one and only, the American, variety), he may have been adviser to M. Mitterrand, but his reasoning and expression bore the old Party-line stamp. I am afraid that the demolition of Solzhenitsyn in the West has been brought about mainly by *la gauche non-communiste*. Thus, before we proclaim "the end of Communist thought" and of its influence, we first have to conduct a closer examination of its lingering echoes, traces, ricochets. The ideologues are still among us.

[2] See, in ENCOUNTER, October 1973, the critique by Sidney Hook, "For Louis Althusser".

Eccentricity & Science



WRITERS, ARTISTS, and philosophers like to imagine invention in the sciences as a mechanical exercise and to picture scientific researchers as plodders midway between academic pedant and skilled workman. There are detectable overtones of resentment against these intellectuals of "the other camp". Do they, in fact, really deserve to be called "intellectuals"?

In his memorable Rede lecture, aptly entitled "The Two Cultures" (first published in ENCOUNTER, June and July 1959), Sir Charles Snow, himself a cross between physicist and novelist, recalled that the distinguished Cambridge mathematician G. H. Hardy had remarked to him one day: "Have you noticed how the word *intellectual* is used nowadays? There seems to be a new definition which certainly doesn't include Rutherford or Eddington or Dirac or Adrian or me . . . ." The expulsion of this band of Nobel laureates for physics, chemistry, and medicine from the thinking community was a measure of the depth of prejudice that existed and still exists regarding the nature of scientific creation.

Fortunately, it sometimes happens that a holder of science's first prize writes a book showing how this type of creation unfolds. Because, as François Jacob insists over and over again in his autobiography,[1] scientific books and articles do not begin to reflect the researcher's experience of the research process. The finished product, as published, is a matter of results; it is stylised in an ideal path, frozen in a

[1] *La statue intérieure*. By FRANÇOIS JACOB. Editions Odile Jacob.

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retrospective logic, cleansed of all the "*jeu des possibles*" (to borrow the title of an earlier work by this author). Yet in the course of its day-to-day elaboration scientific invention springs from disorder more often than from order, from intuition more often than from the systematic approach, from chance more often than from reason—even if, as Pascal said, "*Le hasard ne favorise que les esprits préparés* (Chance smiles only on minds that are prepared). . . ." It springs less frequently from what is central than from what is marginal.

François Jacob is a living illustration of that marginality. He became central only because for a long time he was eccentric as, initially, was the field of research into which he ventured and the working party he joined on the most irrational of wagers. A scientific discovery may be unexpected, but the appearance of a research talent utterly defies comprehension. This volume of memoirs elucidates for us the gulf that may exist between the personality as it emerges from its formative years and that which subsequently emanates from it—the spectacle, day by day, of an unforeseeable "plus" proceeding from an individual who is no longer simply a self-sustaining machine, producing results purely for the sake of producing results. Why, and by what process, does he suddenly turn into a visionary of nature, a discoverer of hidden truths, an "assayer" (*il saggiatore*) as Galileo called him?

François Jacob, scanning his past and examining the former selves of his childhood and adolescence, makes every effort to diagnose the symptoms of a predisposition to research. All he succeeds in doing, really, is to throw into even greater relief the discontinuities between the various stages of his life and the crucial role that accidents played in it. When he left France at the age of twenty to join General de Gaulle in London, he had two years' medicine under his belt—that was all. In the campaign that followed the Normandy landings, he was so badly wounded that he never recovered the kind of manual dexterity essential to the practice of surgery, which had been his first vocation.

Without the wound, he would have spent his whole life opening people's stomachs. A mature student of twenty-six after the War, he completed his training without enthusiasm: he did not enter for the major competitive examinations, and had no intention of practising medicine. More or less unemployed at the age of thirty, he knocked on various doors, including that of the Institut Pasteur. There, sheer determination got him a place in the laboratory of André Lwoff, despite a weakness in biology which he managed to conceal by wisely saying nothing at all when he was unable to exploit his mastery of the monosyllabic answer. In fact, at that time Jacob did not have even the most basic qualifications in the subject. He first had to work for the requisite degrees, which he did with an extremely bad grace alongside students ten years his junior. And it was precisely there that this failure-cum-imposter performed the miracle. A beginner, he initiated himself in the rudiments of his science by renewing it as he went along. In his ignorance he learned by discovery; for want of knowing the biology of the present, in a prodigious leap of creative incompetence he invented the biology of the future.

That was in 1950. Ten years later, just before the Christmas of 1960, François Jacob put his name—together with Jacques Monod—to the famous article on "Genetic Regulatory Mechanisms in the Synthesis of Proteins" that furnished man's first explanation of how a gene works.[2]

It would be wrong, of course, to reduce research to the status of a conjuring trick. This swift survey shows only the outward aspect of events. Jacob's seeming incompetence was a highly Socratic affair, concealing a secret attention to what other researchers could not see as yet. The fact remains that creation, in the scientific domain as in others, is never the extension of what is known. Jacob says as much himself, in a sentence that will set all historians of science thinking:

> "Contrary to what was long my belief, experimental science does not set out to explain the unknown in terms of the known, as in certain kinds of mathematical proof. Quite the opposite, in fact: it aims to account for what we see in terms of the properties of what we imagine, to explain the visible by the invisible."

In other words, the truly new and promising fields of investigation are those whose existence no one suspects.

Around 1950 French science scorned or belittled the works of *l'équipe de Pasteur*, which operated outside official circles and independently of official financing since it enjoyed the backing of a number of American foundations. Only so paradoxical a team would have been capable of accepting so unorthodox a researcher. François Jacob had previously knocked at more conventional doors, but in vain. An indifferent French academic world was on course to miss completely a body of discoveries that was to constitute the greatest success story in biology of this century.

The psychological processes of scientific discovery are another aspect that fails to conform to the received view. For instance, there is a whole book waiting to be written on the role of the cinema in the progress of cell genetics. I do not mean on the use of film in the laboratory; I mean on genetics researchers as film buffs, *cinéphiles*. It was in a Montparnasse cinema, in July 1958, that François Jacob suddenly felt his mind being invaded by the crucial hypotheses that were to lead him to his important discovery. And in *The Double Helix* James Watson, the 1962 Nobel prize-winner, describes how for months he used to sprawl in dark cinemas dreaming vaguely of the solution that was eventually to come to him: an understanding of DNA, the substance that offers within a single structure—"the double helix"—sufficient diversity of forms to accommodate the entire code of heredity.

Unfortunately the films did not always provide the requisite stimulus. "Occasionally my wild pursuit of the celluloid backfired", Watson wrote, "the worst occasion being an evening set aside for *Ecstasy*. Peter and I had both

[2] To the everlasting shame of the French academic world, this article, which led to the Nobel Prize in 1965, was published in English, in *The Journal of Molecular Biology*.

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been too young to observe the original showings of Hedy Lamarr's romps in the nude, and so on the long-awaited night . . . we went off to the Rex . . . ." Imagine their disgust when they discovered that the swimming scenes had been cut by the British censor!

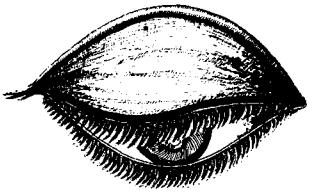
La statue intérieure, "the statue within", a research scientist's account of how he discoverd his own talent, suggests to us that scientific creation is no different from any other kind: at least, not as a subjective process; obviously it is distinguished by its point of application and by the sanction of experiment. Nevertheless, Jacob writes, there is such a thing as *un style en science*, and it changes with each individual, just as it does in art, in literature, or in painting.

Furthermore, as we have constantly to remind ourselves, science does not advance on its own, unaided. It is always men who carry it forward, or fail to do so—men who, if the academic environment is inhospitable, the education system stifling, or the research institute sterile, may well never show themselves, dying without ever discovering that they possessed *le don d'inventer*, the gift of discovery.

J.-F.R.

Old Values & the West's Own *Glasnost*

In Praise of "Furtiveness"—By Digby Anderson



It is becoming increasingly clear that "the open society" is a dangerous and misleading ideal. English society is far too "open" already. This "open society" is not a solution but a problem, perhaps *the* problem. (Not for Gospodin Gorbachov of *glasnost* fame, but for the West: which illustrates, perhaps, "dialectics".)

In the 1980s it became respectable, at least less unrespectable, for intellectuals to recognise the virtues of an "open economy"—an economy characterised by dispersed, rather than centralised, initiative, by consequent competition, minimal government ownership and regulation, and wider ownership of private property. Such ideas had been out of fashion during the long "Keynesian" consensus and especially during the Marxist fevers of the later 1960s. They returned, partly because of "real" factors such as inflation, partly as a result of an intellectual renaissance in Britain, led by the Institute of Economic Affairs. The virtues of an "open polity"—characterised by free elections, free speech, an unpoliticised judiciary, and due process of law—had never been quite so out of favour; but the 1980s saw them recognised with a renewed vigour, although even now there is a reluctance to espouse the energetic opposition to their enemies which such recognition implies. "Anti-Communism" is still not popular.

These, albeit incomplete, enthusiasms for an open economy and an open polity were comparatively successful attempts to "put the clock back"—an enterprise once, indeed still, widely believed to be impossible. Sensibly, recognising this widespread belief, the enthusiasts were careful not to describe their efforts in this way. Contemporary opinion, unflinchingly (even idolatrously) wedded to the idea of remorseless progress, would surely have baulked at manifest reaction. It is one thing to have to take seriously the ideas of an open economy and an open polity, quite another to accept that what one is taking so seriously is *old* ideas—ideas which were there for the taking, gathering dust; ideas which most intellectuals had persistently misunderstood, ignored, and written off; ideas which were the product of a "less-developed age". To be successful, the ideas had to be perceived as *new*. The "Right" had to be a "Radical Right"—better still, "the New Right".

Perhaps this explains why there is such opposition to the third set of reactionary ideas, those concerned with values. There was bound to be unease here, not just because many of the values touch even intellectuals quite closely, even personally, but because the debate was overtly described as one about a "return" to "Victorian values".[1] Had these old values been dressed up as *new* values, a sort of ethical M3, they would have been much more acceptable—challenging neither people's former behaviour nor their belief in progress. The Aids controversy illustrates this well. The most distasteful aspect of a distasteful subject, for progressive intellectuals, was that the *old* morality seemed to be right after all. Add up the facts, and the "safe" behaviour they imply is, more or less, that urged by millennia of Judaeo-Christian morality. How could such a thing be? How could *facts*, the proper enemy of *beliefs*, preach the same message (albeit rather belatedly)? And so began the squirming equivocation. In the end, the wisdom of a return to chastity and fidelity was grudgingly accepted; but only if those words were not used, if the advice was sterilised into safe medical language.

But it is in the realm of values, morals, and society that the fascinating rediscoveries are to be made and the orthodoxies challenged. The very hysteria of the reaction to "Victorian values" shows that. Whether it be about Aids, homosexuality, or abortion, the horror of the intellectuals' reaction is

[1] See, in Encounter, July-August 1986, Patrick Middleton's article, "For 'Victorian', Read 'Neo-Georgian'", followed in March 1987 by Jeffrey Richards's comment, "Victorian Values Revisited", with Patrick Middleton's response, "Objection Overruled".

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extraordinary and surely a topic for study in its own right. Usually the "moral" view which so unnerves them is, I concede, a pretty pathetic morality anyway. It is not a genuine "Jewish" or "Christian" morality, not a categorical imperative morality, but a functionalist application of moral codes—avoid promiscuity because "it does not work for society", *not* because it is wrong. It is a morality in which wrong is no more than social malfunction. But even this near-beer morality, stressing as it does *general*, even ubiquitous laws, is too much for those used to "constructing personal life-styles" to fit their varying "situations". Goodness knows how they would react if confronted with the real thing: a genuine, 100%-proof morality watered down with no fizzy sociological apologetic.

I SUSPECT THAT what the intellectuals are displaying is no less than moral incompetence, an inability to handle ethical concepts. Many refuse to do so anyway, making it an article of faith that problems of crime, poverty, and the rest have no *moral* component. They are considered through and through as *social*, even "social-structural" problems. Others betray their incompetence when they start to manipulate ethical concepts rhetorically. Look at the attempts to work up a moral indignation against "the scandals of the Inner City" or the Bishops mumbling about "community . . . sharing . . . compassion" during Scargill's miners's strike. Then compare such politico-sentimental froth with any popular Victorian tome on morality (even a cookery book), and see who are the sophisticates.

ON THE MOST elementary tests of developed knowledge—explicit definitions, internal differentiation and interrelation—our ancestors win hands down. While contemporaries childishly repeat one or two slogans about "Identifying with the Poor", our ancestors produced thoughtful programmes of individual action, lists of large numbers of virtues and vices whose personal and social interrelationships were nicely calculated. Cardinal Ratzinger has asked why this supposedly most intelligent and best-educated generation can only cope with church services fit for children. One might equally ask why it can only cope with an infantile morality.

Which brings us back to the familiar term "open". Contemporary reactions to moral topics are shot through with at least three assumptions, each of which, in its way, is about "openness", the desirability of "an open society". And these assumptions permeate the reactions not only (predictably) of the *gauchiste* remnants of the 1960s trying to hang on to the last tattered remnants of their lost cause, but, more worryingly, some of those who support "open economies" and polities. If these last are so good, why not a thoroughly modern "open society" too?

Because, in my view, openness applied to society has acquired quite different connotations. First there are those who imply that society should be "open" in the sense that individual adults should be free to do as they wish, not only unchecked by the state but by anyone, be they individuals or social groupings. Those who try to stop them are "interfering" and should desist. Carried to the extreme, this view is even uneasy at some individuals and institutions expressing *disapproval* of other individuals or institutions. It is on the constant alert for "discrimination" and is deeply upset by the existence of "stigma" in society. At its vaguest, it is a distaste for any negative judgments of one person by another.

At the institutional level, Churches, for example, are obsessed with playing-up the beliefs they share with other religious "communities" and soft-pedalling anything which might offend. At the individual level, relatives and friends are nervous about suggesting to a young mother that she is keeping her child up far too late and that it needs to go to bed at regular hours. Isn't it *her* child, *her* business? Others must offer even suggestions gingerly. There is supposed to be a whole range of "private" matters on which others should not comment, at least critically. We should even be careful about laughing at others. This society, free from disapproval, does not truly exist—but a part of the current moral orthodoxy thinks it *desirable*, a society in which individuals and groups are *free*, not only from state interference, but from the interference, the censure, and the wit and humour of others.

In this non-disapproving society, because others don't interfere, no one will have to hide anything. Everything can be above board—genuinely open. Banished with disapproval will be the social organisation of disapproval, gossip and scandal, and the habitual generalisation and replication of disapproval: "prejudice". And for those who think such openness is desirable, it goes without saying that among the bad features of current society are not only stigma but secrecy. "Coming out" is good; repression is bad.

The good society is "open" in a third sense: everything is possible. The slogan is "*Why not?*" In this society, there are no no-go cultural areas, no dark corners. In sexuality, art, "life-style", anything is do-able—provided only that no identifiable hurt is caused to others. It is, indeed, a society which can see nothing reprehensible in necrophilia, because there is no obvious victim.

This view of the open society is neither coherent nor new, but it is still a pervasive feature of media commentary and ordinary conversation. Its origins, for once, have little to do with Marx or *gauchisme*—perhaps only a touch of Dr Marcurse. Somewhere, in this fear of repression, is the figure of Freud. A more important general feature is perversion: the perversion of individualism into atomism, of tolerance into lack of discrimination, and of love into a moist niceness. Most important of all is what I might call a lack of sociology. For this sort of open society is not a society at all, in the recognisable sense.

Societies depend on incentives and disincentives, expressed approval and disapproval: socially organised approval and disapproval both as spurs to action and as channels of information about their members' relative preferences. The qualities talked of as if evil—judgment, gossip, scandal, conflict—are, once cleansed of their contemporary pejorative formulation by pairs of speech marks, nothing but the inevitable fabric of social order—as are the reactions to them: fear, shame, secrecy, guilt. It is also essential that a sophisticated society has a barrage of boundaries separating

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the private and the public, the sacred and the profane, the secret and the open, indeed closed and open secrets. Everything must not be "above board". And so intricately and artfully are these boundaries drawn and parts coordinated that the sophisticated society will surely need, in order to pull and hold itself together, that glue loathed above anything else by the open-society enthusiasts—what they would call "casuistry" or "hypocrisy".

Take any batch of current problems. Poverty, AIDS, One-Parent Families, the "Two Nations", North-South divide, Alcoholism, legislation on Illegitimacy . . . all have the formal feature that their sufferers or potential sufferers have to be encouraged to avoid or escape the problem for themselves, while those finally trapped in the problems need help. It is imperative to maintain standards, incentives, and disincentives (in some cases very unpleasant disincentives), while at the same time, with the other hand, offering help to those trapped in the problem. Society needs stigma and fear to encourage people to avoid problems and thus to escape them. It also needs compassion to genuine casualties. And since each threatens to undermine the other, their administration requires apparent double standards and a certain amount of secrecy. It's the age-old problem of noisily maintaining firm standards while quietly helping those who fail to meet them.

IF, AS I AM SUGGESTING, society needs "hypocrisy", it also needs a measure of unreason. The disincentives which prevent decline and chaos should not be continually recalculated for another first time by each individual on each and every occasion. If individuals are to go to work, avoid crime, and be faithful to their spouses week after week, it will not be because they reassess the incentives and disincentives daily with the morning papers. Most people refrain from socially damaging actions (including crime) from habit, albeit habit generally or once undergirded by incentives. Social order depends essentially on unthinking behaviour and the institutions which can transmit such habits; families, churches, local communities, cultures.

These are reinforced by other non-rational phenomena: symbols. Symbols always sound rather harmless until you realise that crowns sit on heads and nooses go round necks. Societies need to show forth their order by crowning or otherwise enthroning some and executing or otherwise eliminating others (e.g. assassins), by excluding some and putting others on pedestals.

"Some", I said. It matters rather much whom you eliminate and whom you crown. That's the key to what a new interest in values would look like. Instead of abdicating a sustained interest in values by refusing judgment on an individual's "private affairs" and by writing off the cements of past societies as "unacceptable stigma" or "irrational prejudice", what is required is that individuals and non-state institutions accept the currency of social order and try to use it wisely and vigorously.

Above all, those of us who are *for* a very free economy and polity must be *against* a "free society" in the sense I have discussed: that is, a wet even a non-society. For if we do not think the politicians capable of delivering order, wealth and welfare, then we must attribute those things to the dispersed initiatives of individuals coordinated in and by society itself, its exchange mechanism, its values, and its institutions. A low view of the state implies not a low, but a high view of society. Values are a crucial part of that society; and we may well find that "rediscovering values" leads us beyond their merely social function.

At the very least, we should stop being automatically scornful of a proper sociology and, just as "capitalism" and "enterprise" have been rehabilitated, start to rescue "stigma . . . conflict . . . gossip . . . prejudice . . . hypocrisy"—and even my own favourite, "furtiveness".

Imperial Differences

By Max Beloff

MUCH OF Asia and almost all of Africa is the scene of a "time of troubles" that Arnold Toynbee saw as the normal aftermath of Empire. The power vacuum thus created is disputed by the new "Super-Powers": the Soviet Union and the United States. But whereas Soviet power and influence are exercised through the familiar devices of imperialism—a ruling élite at home seeking economic advantages and moral satisfaction from expansion abroad—the United States, believing itself free from colonialist temptations, has to make do with largely negative explanations of its own side of the struggle. Americans do not set up a "good empire" to balance against the "evil empire" they from time to time denounce. And it is arguable that it is the lack of an imperial ideology rather than lack of practical skills that has made the American venture into world politics so frustrating an experience that Americans are constantly seeking for ways to abandon it altogether.[1]

It is thus tempting for the historian to try to illuminate the contemporary American experience by comparing the American involvement with British imperialism in its most self-conscious decades. And such is the task now attempted, in his book *Three Faces of Imperialism*, by Phillip Darby, a young and distinguished Australian scholar whose provenance may

[1] I have set out some of my views on this subject in my contribution to the volume of essays entitled *The Special Relationship*, edited by the late Hedley Bull and Roger Louis (Oxford University Press, 1986). It also contains an essay by Professor Louis rejecting my view.

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be thought to guarantee an objectivity denied to both British and American writers on his theme.[2] To serve his purpose, Mr Darby employs the device of dividing the imperialist impulse into its most salient features: (*1*) the contest for power; (*2*) the search for external solutions to the economic problems of the imperial power; and (*3*) the moral aspect, that set of ideas and values which made practitioners of imperialism—the curzons, the Cromers, the lugards—believe that what they were doing was of benefit as much to the ruled as to the rulers, that theirs was a sacred trust for civilisation seen as a whole and indivisible.

The book is both original in conception and interesting to read as an escape from more conventional treatments of the period. Mr Darby, who writes well himself, is interested in what literature can add to more formal records as a way of getting into the minds of those involved in imperial situations and conflicts. It is useful and illuminating to be reminded of what people thought they were doing as well as what they actually did. Nor is Mr Darby unaware that Britain was not the only vehicle for Western penetration of Asia and Africa; at the same time he makes the valid point that, for the other European colonial powers, overseas expansion and consolidation were thought about in so far as they affected the all-important balances in Europe. For Britain, the Empire—and then the Commonwealth—retained an autonomous place in public policy until the crisis of the Second World War.

Nevertheless, the reader may well conclude that Mr Darby's schema does not serve him so well when we come to the post-1945 era and America's turn to play the major role on the world stage. The reason, I believe, is that while "the Cold War" was certainly the occasion that brought about the new deployment of American power in Asia and to a much more limited extent in Africa, the United States did not enter upon these commitments with no hangover from the past. The story of "American imperialism" does not begin with its taking up the task of resisting Communism in Korea or Indo-China—but with the Monroe Doctrine (from one point of view) and with the Spanish-American war (from another). It was in dealing not with the consequences of British or French or Dutch withdrawal from Empire but with the aftermath of Spanish rule that the ability of the United States to "think imperially" was first challenged.

The author's exclusion of Latin America and almost of the Philippines from his consideration of American involvement with the "Third World" gives an artificiality to his treatment of the subject, not present in the earlier chapters dealing with the British experience. For Latin America certainly and the largely Christianised Philippines to some extent were not parts of ancient and exotic civilisations or barbarisms but parts of the "New World". Mexicans, averred Woodrow Wilson, must be taught to elect good men—after all, North Americans had elected *him*. Curzon and Cromer would not have put it that way.

So while Phillip Darby is right in detecting the strength of the moralistic strain in US policy and in the insecurity that followed the revelations about its inadequacy after the Viet Nam débâcle, a moralism that could assert itself both through anti-colonialism and then almost overnight through anti-Communism was not really a response to Kipling's call that Americans should "take up the white man's burden".

And Mr Darby's "Asia" excludes the Arab Middle East. Yet, if one is to understand the way in which economics and politics interact in the American system, can one ignore the almost constant interest displayed by the United States in the post-1918 disposition of the territories of the ex-Turkish Empire, and in the oil resources both of that area and of the Arabian Peninsula and Iran?

THE KEY TO THE DIFFERENCE between the United States and the British imperial systems is that the British system (though rightly regarded as extending to areas of "informal empire") had as its core a formal empire where power and responsibility could not be separated, and where the former was increasingly seen as entailing the latter. What the Americans have sought and still seek is influence, but with the minimum extension of political responsibility. I suspect that it is a role that in their modest ways Australia and New Zealand covet as well. And this may in part explain the missing element in Phillip Darby's analysis.

[2] *Three Faces of Imperialism: British and American Approaches to Asia and Africa, 1870-1970*. By PHILLIP DARBY. Yale University Press, $22.50, £14.95.

Locational

Sonar equipment. An American gay
with big money and a handlebar
moustache. And always the mountains
not listening, wool-gathering, heads
in a mist. Clive has been loading his nostrils
freely. The boat rocks
itself to sleep; water cradles it,
grey and cold as a New York dawn.
"The mother's down there somewhere."
A grin shows discoloured teeth. The tattoo
is of a virgin ravished by a snake.
Eddy has come-to-bed eyes. Bleary
with desire, he tunes in on expensive
equipment. Scotland is a fag;
but next week he will be in Amsterdam
where the real action is. "Locate
and kill", Clive says when questioned.
"There's no other way." Single malt for breakfast.
The lad from Fort William wonders
where the girls are. Discoloured teeth again.
A Loch Ness Monster? There are two:
one from Queens, the second from L.A.
Clouds chase each other across the speeded-
up sky. Weird psychosexual behaviour.

Paul Groves

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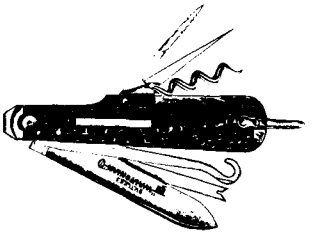
A Special Book Section

Literature & Criticism

The Dangerous Edge of Things

The Novels of Patrick Hamilton—By DONALD THOMAS



PATRICK HAMILTON had two distinctive literary gifts, so compellingly exercised that it seems extraordinary for his name to have vanished from bookshops and libraries within a few years of his death. In the first place, there is perhaps no other English writer since Robert Browning with a comparable ability to evoke characters whose mere physical presence sets the nerves creeping. It is not just that Mr Eccles of *The Plains of Cement*, or Mr Thwaites in *The Slaves of Solitude*, or Netta in *Hangover Square* has a tension of manner and voice, shrill on the teeth as fingernails drawn sharply down a slate. The figures of Hamilton's novels spin out their aimless or malign existence on what Browning called "the dangerous edge of things". From this precipice of moral and mental vertigo, they topple headlong to madness, psychopathy, or more rarely to sainthood.

In Browning's famous poem, Porphyria's lover, with the simple moral irrelevance of the truly insane, deflects criticism by assuring the reader that the girl he strangled died easily. He murdered her with every humane consideration: "I am quite sure she felt no pain." George Harvey Bone, the schizophrenic of *Hangover Square*, drowns Netta in her bath, adopting the style of what Browning called the "tender murderer". "Poor Netta—he had made a good job of it and hadn't hurt her—he was sure of that. That was the one thing he had sworn—that he wouldn't hurt anybody." Presently he smashes in the skull of his male rival with a number seven golf club, inquiring as the victim falls, "Are you all right, old boy? I'm sorry. I didn't hurt you, did I? Are you all right?"

In lesser felonies, Browning's monster, Mr Sludge the Medium—who blames his dupes for deserving to be cheated—might have given lessons to Ernest Ralph Gorse the swindler-turned-murderer whom Hamilton modelled principally on Neville Heath and whose career opens with *The West Pier* in 1951.

Hamilton's second gift relates to T. S. Eliot's admiration of literature that gives the reader a sense of being in a particular place at a particular time. That vivid particularity dominates Hamilton's creation of an uneasy city. It is a suggestive and poetically shabby London, though recalling a metropolis of Dickens or Baudelaire rather than Eliot's *Waste Land* vision. In 1935 J. B. Priestley offered an A-to-Z of its locations in his preface to Hamilton's trilogy *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*.

> "The scene throughout is the brick and concrete jungle of lower middle class London life, the crowded, muddled, noisy but inarticulate world of small pubs just off Oxford Street and Edgware Road, the monster Corner Houses, cheap lodgings in Pimlico, and the less expensive picture theatres, a world of barmaids and waiters and prostitutes and the lower orders of secondhand-motor salesmen."

Hamilton was a Marxist and, indeed, a member of the Communist Party throughout most of his adult life. Yet he was a working-class writer neither by origin nor by adoption. His father was a barrister—atheist by conviction, evangelical by temperament. On his twenty-first birthday, Bernard Hamilton met a prostitute in the bar of the Empire Theatre and married her as the means of her redemption. She found redemption unendurable and escaped by jumping to her death under an electric train at Wimbledon station. A second Mrs Hamilton was the mother of Patrick, born in 1905, and of Bruce Hamilton, his elder brother.

After childhood and school in Brighton and Westminster, Patrick Hamilton was sent to a commercial college to learn the useful trades of shorthand and typing. Before these could be put to practical purposes, he joined a touring theatre company that specialised in melodramas. He wrote two of his own, which survived more easily than his novels. *Rope* (1929) is an English reworking of the Leopold and Loeb murder-as-intellectual-amusement in Chicago; *Gaslight* (1938) is the drama of a Victorian husband trying to persuade his sane wife that she is going mad.

After publishing three promising but slighter novels in his twenties, Hamilton made his reputation in 1929-35 with the trilogy *Twenty Thousand Streets Under The Sky*. The female protagonist, Jenny, was based upon Lily, a West End prostitute with whom Hamilton had a long and uncommercial

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affair, as if following his father's example. The trilogy consists of *The Midnight Bell, The Siege of Pleasure*, and *The Plains of Cement*.

His literary career, and indeed his life, very nearly ended after *The Midnight Bell*. On a winter evening in December 1931, he was hit by a speeding car near Lexham Gardens and appallingly injured. His right wrist was broken, he had compound fractures of his right leg and left arm, his head and face were permanently marked. Part of his nose was torn away and later replaced by an obviously artifical insertion. Months of physical and emotional agony conditioned his life and his writing. He had good reason, in *The Plains of Cement*, to describe the Middlesex Hospital in a single evocative phrase as "that vast palace of pain".

He drank, sufficiently by the 1950s to kill him in a few years. Bruce Hamilton calculated that his brother lived on three bottles of whisky a day, with just enough food to act as "blotting paper". Electro-convulsive therapy promised a short-term cure, but Patrick Hamilton died in 1962, having written nothing for seven years.

Hangover Square: A Story of Darkest Earls Court (1941) became the greatest popular success among his novels and *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947) was a highly-praised vivisection of emotional poisons and passions in a Henley boarding-house. *The West Pier* in 1951 was intended as the first of four novels following Ernest Ralph Gorse from his beginnings as a gratuitously cruel and contemptuous schoolboy to his apotheosis on the gallows of Pentonville. *Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse* appeared in 1953 and *Unknown Assailant* in 1955. The last work of the projected tetralogy, describing the public fame of Gorse the killer, was never written. The second and third novels of the sequence show a progressive failure of Hamilton's power, still at its height in *The West Pier*. This was in part a reflection of the crisis of drink in his own life and in part a sign of the unwisdom of attempting to sustain the repetitious swindling and contemptuous moral perversions of Gorse over so great a span.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES of Hamilton's life—the road accident and the subsequent drinking—were determining features of his writing. As some men might have written compulsively about money-making or sex, Hamilton wrote about drink. His novels are not much about drunkards but drinking seems to be the normal occupation of his people. Rich or poor, they are men and women without homes or roots, passing their lives in pubs or cocktail lounges, the circle bars of theatres or "splendidly at home in the Hotel Metropole".

If Hamilton's two particular loyalties were to Communism and the bottle, he remained true to both. The revelations of Stalin's crimes in the 1950s shook him but did not budge him. Nor did the events of 1956 in Budapest or those of 1961 in Berlin. Yet, unlike drink, Communism had no place in his fiction. When he intervenes to address the reader of his novels, it is on such topics as the "bitter rage" or "abominable detestation" that kindly men and women feel towards an insect or a mouse which they fail to kill outright or instantly. Mortally injured and an object of pity, the wounded creature actually provokes their fury and disgust by its failure to die

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cleanly or at once. It is another moral curiosity whose possibilities would have intrigued Robert Browning.

HAMILTON'S REPUTATION as a novelist rests upon two trilogies—*Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky* and the career of the detestable Gorse—and two intervening books, *Hangover Square* and *The Slaves of Solitude*. The two single novels and *The West Pier* are back in print, and so now is the first trilogy.[1]

Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky opens with *The Midnight Bell*, the story of Bob the self-educated public-house waiter and his love affair with a heartless but pathetic West End prostitute, Jenny. The second part, *The Siege of Pleasure*, is a recollection of Jenny's graduation to prostitution from domestic service. It happens in a single evening of fast cars and road-houses, a hit-and-run accident and the company of flashy young motorists. *The Plains of Cement*, the third part, shows the failure of affection between Bob and the young barmaid Ella, and her courtship by the pompous and well-fleshed Mr Eccles with his Funny Little Habits and excruciating pleasantries.

No less than in *Bleak House* or *Our Mutual Friend*, London is a *dramatis persona* of *The Midnight Bell*, heard and seen from the pub of that name near the Euston Road. "A grim yet unburdened and plaintive sound—the dim roar of traffic in the Tottenham Court Road—the far thunder of trams where the Hampstead Road begins—the yelling of children in Warren Street near by. . . . A lorry smashed by in the Euston Road and faded away in the distance." The debt of Hamilton to Dickens appears in the creation of his city as much as in the heavily characterised bar-flies and regulars of the shabby little pub with its live-in waiter and barmaid, its "Governor" and his family.

The skill which Hamilton shows in this respect suggests that a period of literary observation of city life running from 1840 to 1940—or between *Sketches by Boz* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*—is a more valid division than "The Victorian Age". Hamilton, like Orwell, sees the last phase of a century-long development ended abruptly by the War. His poetic sense of night and day in London has almost everything in common with Mayhew:

> "All day long the Hampstead Road is a thing of sluggish grey litter and rumbling trams. But at dark it glitters. Glitters, and gleams, and twinkles, and is phosphorescent—and the very noises of the trams are like romantic thunders from the hooves of approaching night. . . . There was a little red yet in the high clouds of the glowing sky, and in this inspiring light and amid winking illuminations of a mauve metropolis, Bob's high spirits reached a peak of pure contentment and peace."

With hardly an alteration, this evocation in *The Midnight Bell* might come from *London Labour and the London Poor* in 1864.

Literary allusion is never far below the surface of Hamilton's narrative. As well as giving a name to a pub, "The Midnight Bell" is the title of a Gothick tale by Francis Lathom, published in 1798, one of the six "horrid novels" referred to in *Northanger Abbey*. (The writing of Kenneth Clark and Montague Summers had given a new vogue to the genre in 1929.) This sepulchral resonance of the name deepens the sense of unease and despair which haunts the pub's inmates, the young and intellectually ambitious Bob, and the good-hearted and undissimulating Ella.

At the mid-point of the book, as if in conscious tribute to Dickens, the narrator introduces a winter fog: "A dense brown fog obliterated the Universe; and it was a day outside ordinary human computation." The speculative tone of the description, as much as the impressionistic scene of Fitzrovia, is a ringer for the opening of *Bleak House*. "You were cold to the marrow of your bones. Garish lights were lit everywhere inside; your breathing made perpetual little white fogs. The roll of traffic was hushed and torpid. Fog signals went off like distant tyres bursting."

To a more literate readership than our own, such allusiveness was no impediment. It is not central to Hamilton's story but exists as a baroque embellishment, rather as Dryden had employed Virgilian similes to add colour to poetic narrative. Bob the barman educates himself to be a writer, by the example of *John O'London's Weekly* and the first volume of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. He remains an unlikely candidate for authorship but that is hardly relevant. His hopes confirm him as decent and thoughtful, ambitious but unworldly.

THE MIDNIGHT BELL is about the emotional and financial ruin of Bob by the pretty young prostitute Jenny, for whom he first prescribes gin and peppermint to ease her stomach-ache and to whom he lends ten shillings to pay her rent. If it is true that a novelist writes the same book repeatedly, changing only the costumes of the masquerade, then Hamilton's single story is that of the predator and the prey. Hunter and victim are characteristically of opposite sex, anticipating Hamilton's remark in *Unknown Assailant* that relationships between men and women, and indeed between those of the same sex, are essentially sado-masochistic. His victims may appear in a variety of costumes. The predators are always the vamp or the con-man.

The Midnight Bell anatomises Bob's torment with an acuteness verging on the morbid. Writing of his brother, Bruce Hamilton recalls this as Patrick's fictionalised account of his affair with the West End prostitute Lily. The final betrayal, when Bob becomes incapably drunk in his misery and is left in a doss-house by two Soho acquaintances, was a chapter from Patrick Hamilton's own experience. He woke from sleep with no idea of where he was or how he got there, in the communal ward with its snortings and groanings—"London's defeated grasping angrily at oblivion", as he describes them in the novel.

[1] *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*. By PATRICK HAMILTON. Chatto & Windus, £5.95. *Hangover Square* and *The West Pier* are published by Penguin at £1.75 each, and *The Slaves of Solitude* by Oxford Paperbacks at £2.95.

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The eight meetings between Bob and Jenny, which constitute the story, are observed with the same nuances of affection and evasion, suspicion and desire that characterise the obsessive search by Proust as narrator for the true Albertine. Hamilton works on a smaller scale, concentrating Jenny's faults into her cruelty, and eliminating all her vices but the emotional mainspring of egotism. "A vulgar little soul with a little white body that walked about the West End and sold itself."

Financial extortion turning often to blackmail is a concomitant of many of these relationships in Hamilton's fiction. It is necessary that Bob should lose his £80 life-savings as well as his heart in exchange for Jenny's easy affection, the hugs and kisses, the prostitute's familiar "dear", and the promises of love which lead to resentment as soon as she is reminded of them.

Jenny's path to prostitution, the story of a hit-and-run car accident in which a man is knocked off his bike and killed, was written in the aftermath of Hamilton's own injuries. The slangy young men with their moustaches and cars, their pick-ups and lounge-bar manners, are sketched with bitter and incisive skill. It is the slightest part of the trilogy yet it serves to balance the scales in Hamilton's city of dreadful night. Jenny is "vulgar, ignorant, detestable". She is simultaneously "artless, innocuous, innocent". In making her so, Hamilton invites the reader's pity for the vamp.

Comparisons between Hamilton and Dickens are, in one sense, misleading. In Mr Micawber or Mr Chadband there are no surprises of the kind that Mr Eccles or Mr Thwaites presents. Character may change and past events may be revealed. But hidden personalities or sexual proclivities, secret vulgarities or private passions, are not to be unveiled. Constancy or predictability is their virtue. Victorian imitators found not the least difficulty in prolonging Dickens' fictional lives through *Nickleby Married* or Renton Nicholson's *Dombey and Daughter*. The shock for Hamilton's readers is all the greater in the last part of his trilogy, *The Plains of Cement*, when he takes them behind the scenes and removes the verbal mask of such characterisation. It is as if the actors in a farce were caught off-stage in shabbiness and despair. The bar of the Midnight Bell is populated by indeterminate middle-aged soaks, Mr Sounder and his letters-to-the-paper, Mr Wall and his lugubrious puns. Beyond these tropes may lie the profoundest fears and most appalling lusts, but a Dickensian would not have revealed them. Hamilton appears to write in this convention—and then repudiates it with sinister and sardonic effect.

The jovial Mr Eccles is permitted to jump the counter and court the barmaid, Ella, with her dark shingled hair and simple manner, a young woman of half his age. Barmaid and drinker become middle-aged cock-robin lover and doubting sweetheart. Though genial Mr Eccles is not violent nor an extortioner, Hamilton never created a more breathtaking monster. Edmund Gosse once remarked that Dickens was permitted to Victorian children because he presented sexual passion in a ridiculous light. In the pages of Dickens, Mr Eccles might have provoked laughter. In those of Hamilton he makes the reader wince.

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With his comfortable income and the "Army people" who constitute his shadowy family, Mr Eccles has every social and sexual advantage over the innocent Ella. A virgin at fifty-two, he veers between prudery and vulgarity, authoritarian homily and easy-going innuendo. Worst of all, as the trap closes on the naive young woman, he becomes possessed of "the awful vocabulary of archness . . . saucy, elephantine, fatuous". A cross between Oliver Hardy and Bluebeard, he puts Ella in her place with grating pleasantry. "You little Tease . . . I can be a Tease as well, you know." Sitting opposite her at a saloon-bar table, fondling her knee surreptitiously, he inspires her with panic that he will make fools of them both in public.

> "'You darling', she heard Mr Eccles saying. 'Do you know what'll be happening to you in a moment?'
>
> 'What?'
>
> 'I'll be coming round and kissing you in front of all these people, if you're not careful.'
>
> She did not answer but looked at her glass.
>
> 'Or giving you a good spanking. I don't know which', said Mr Eccles with indescribable roguishness. 'What about some more champagne?'"

Mr Eccles is an appalling vision of the common man writ large—preposterous, yet never other than convincing. The damage which he does to Ella is less by inflicting himself on her during the weeks of doomed courtship than in destroying her chance to win Bob away from Jenny. The novel and the trilogy culminate in Bob's departure as a seaman, Jenny's dedication to whoredom and petty blackmail, and Ella the barmaid weeping alone in her servant's bedroom.

The bed, in Hamilton's novels, is a place of solitary grief rather than shared fulfilment. "There is a great deal of the tomb in a bedroom", he writes in *The Plains of Cement*, "all passions, delights, schemings, ambitions, triumphs, must be taken back at night to these caves of cold arbitration." Contrary to the fashion of the day, he does not hesitate to make authorial aphorisms of this kind with great effect. A few are sententious and many are casual. "The approach of love is something as stealthy and imperceptible as the catching of a cold", is his explanation of the feelings of Bob for Jenny. "A man of spirit never knows he has it until the last moment. . . . He is no worse than he was before, but suddenly he changes his whole attitude. A minute ago he had no cold: this minute he succumbs."

Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky is in part a show of moral freaks but it also involves the shock of recognising the horror of what lies behind the conventional masks of comic fiction. A good deal of the surface characterisation is comic by deception. But the saucy barmaid weeps in her bedroom and the jolly dog is a sexual misfit. Beneath the smile lurks a human nightmare, as if Bertie Wooster were to be diagnosed as having inoperable cancer.

HAMILTON'S THEME OF predator and prey brought him his greatest reward in *Hangover Square: A Story of Darkest Earls Court* (1941). In this case it is the dumb and docile George Harvey Bone who appears the prey, while Netta, the failed actress, is bitch-goddess and predator. But by making Bone a schizophrenic Hamilton adds a further dimension to their relationship. In one mood, Bone is the inert adorer of Netta. In the other, he remembers that his mission in life is to kill her.

Bone, like Jenny in *The Siege of Pleasure*, is a pathetic yet ominous creation. He has the simple and insistent logic of the true obsessive. Not for him King Lear's imagined mice and toasted cheese. He is one with Porphyria's lover or Evelyn Waugh's Mr Loveday, quietly content with his murderous contemplations. The difference is that the abominable Netta is sufficiently vain, deceitful, and greedy to throw the reader's sympathy in Bone's direction. She and the Fascist thug Peter, with convictions for violence on behalf of Oswald Mosley's cause, are so repellent that it could scarcely be otherwise. Netta's first apearance in the novel presents her in a new hairdo that owes everything to Medusa. But she is a modern Medusa who is secretly and sexually stimulated by Fascism. Like Mr Thwaites in *The Slaves of Solitude*, she is a furtive admirer of Hitler. Typically, she has no intellectual conviction in such matters. Her thoughts are described as like fish in a tank, "brooding, self-absorbed, frigid". Bone's usefulness, like that of Bob in *The Midnight Bell*, is to be measured by the length of his purse, though Netta never ceases to remind him as she takes his money that he is "a bloody insufferable bore". Her improbable ingratiation and Bone's longed-for visit to Brighton are ruined when she arrives accompanied by male hangers-on: "You didn't think I could stand you alone, did you?"

LIKE Dickens, Hamilton glides over the precise mechanics of mental alienation—in this case schizophrenia. Bone feels something like a noiseless click in his head which switches him from track to track. "It was a noise inside his head and yet it was not a noise. It was the sound which a noise makes when it abruptly ceases." Elsewhere it is described as being "as if he had dived into a swimming bath and hit his head on the bottom." The *click!* is the weakness of the book. It savours too much of Hollywood "psychological drama" in the 1940s. Yet if it can be accepted as sufficient explanation, *Hangover Square* becomes a compelling account of Bone's progress to murder, through a plaintive reasonableness that belongs in the kingdom of the irreclaimably mad.

Unreality surrounds him from first to last. The "dull green, midnight, nightmare gas" is the fog in which he lives and the poison that ends his life. The suicide of this "big" and "silly" man, rejected and uncomprehending, is described with Hamilton's distinctive blend of pathos and acerbity. Losing consciousness, his last memory is of his sister Ellen who was permitted to hold his hand while he was put to sleep for a childhood operation. She stands there again, murmuring, "It's all right. Don't be frightened, George. It's all right." It is, of course, his own voice and the tone of reassurance which he had used to Netta while drowning her and to Peter while smashing his head with a golf club.

The power of Hamilton's writing in *Hangover Square* is unremitting. Perhaps that is a fault. It is sometimes over-

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written, as melodrama may be, and yet it is much more than melodrama. It has the narrative strength of a first-rate thriller, and yet it is more than a thriller. *Pace* E. M. Forster, it is a splendid example of the novelist's duty to tell a story, to hold the reader from the first page and not relax that grip until the last. That a novel of such qualities should have been regarded as ripe for the literary Indian reservation of the "crime" shelves or in some way not "proper" fiction must now appear preposterous.

The suspense in the book is sustained by being both moral and structural, for Hamilton employs the emotional realities of death and homicide, rather than the cliché of murder. Netta is as powerful a presence to the reader as her infatuated killer, a Medusa whose destruction invites applause. Nor does the power of narrative and judgment offer reassurance. By the merest fraction, Hamilton's moral and visual perception seems out of true, common landmarks betraying expectations. The familiar and acceptable appearance of Earls Court or Brighton is a delusion. Behind the quickly recognised façades and phrases, the bar-room chatter and the motorists' brag, move the figures of a nightmare city. This is a metropolis, flashy, decadent, Fascist, of which the author is sole architect. Characteristically, the last words of *Hangover Square* veil horror by triviality. Bone's obituary consists of three ephemeral lines of newsprint, like the last flickering telegraph of fuddled consciousness:

SLAYS TWO
FOUND GASSED
THINKS OF CAT

To be sure, Hamilton breaks the rules of modernism, though his first youthful work was, ironically, a verse essay on "Modernism". As narrator, he intrudes with his own judgments of character and situation. He does so, as a Victorian might, with splendid self-assurance and panache. Here, for example, is the narrator's farewell to the boarding-house tyrant of *The Slaves of Solitude*, whose pleasure in life has been the persecution and manipulation of women among fellow-guests at the riverside Rosamund Tea Rooms, during the London blitz. Armoured against all insults and abuse, the terror of the dining-room, Mr Thwaites is taken ill one evening with a sudden stomach-ache. In two days all is over.

> "Thus suddenly—having been given less than forty-eight hours' notice of any sort, and in the bloom of his carefree and powerful dotage—this cruel, harsh, stupid, inconsiderate, unthinking man, this lifelong nagger and ragger of servants and old women, this confused yet confusing bully and braggart in small places, died."

The sentence, in two meanings of that word, is typical of Hamilton. It is passionate, energetic, committed and intrusive. Its very structure is a reminder of how far the subtleties of English writing were still conditioned by Latin education. Cicero might almost have pronounced the funeral oration for Mr Thwaites. Like much else in Hamilton's writing, its contrived adjectival style was all that by some standards modern fictional narrative ought not to be. Yet it exemplified that technique by which he led his audience through the strait gate of spellbound concentration.

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A Review Devoted to the Arts of the Imagination

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In 1951, Hamilton took a dangerous literary gamble with the character of Ernest Ralph Gorse. Here, indeed, he penetrated the mask of Wodehousean amiability and showed a moral monstrosity. His own description acknowledges it, and the disease in this case is old-fashioned evil. "Gorse, when lounging at the end of an expensive bar, nearly always wore a monocle and looked like a curious, undistinguished mixture between Bertie Wooster and Satan", he wrote halfway through the second instalment. But to sustain four novels on such a character supposed that the public would be content to follow in scrupulous detail the development of Gorse's criminal personality.

Hamilton was careful to insist that each novel would be complete in itself, and the first part of the gamble paid off. *The West Pier* was a critical success, though it was the "moving dignity" of the swindled shopgirl and the evocation of Brighton rather than the anatomising of Gorse's villainy that caught the reviewers' enthusiasm. Moreover, the market for fiction was still buoyant enough to make the sequence rather than the single novel a major literary form. 1951 also saw the publication of *A Question of Upbringing*, the first volume in Anthony Powell's *Music of Time*, and *The Masters*, which showed C. P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers* sequence at its most popular. The following year added Evelyn Waugh's *Men at Arms*, the opening of *Sword of Honour*. Whether Gorse could inspire such brand-loyalty was always open to doubt.

Hamilton's series was to depend upon a cheater of women who at last became their murderer. The possible models for Gorse, mentioned by Hamilton, were George Joseph Smith and Neville Heath. Others whom he mentions, like Neill Cream, have too few points of resemblance. In social class and manner, as when Gorse masquerades as "The Honourable George Claridge" in *Unknown Assailant*, the likeness is more that of Heath, who had been a swindler by profession for many years before committing the murders of two young women for which he was hanged in 1946. A decade before his execution, when he was a trickster posing under the most absurd titles, the famous exchange between Heath and a stranger in the bar of the Sherwood Inn, Nottingham, has the authentic ring of Gorse.

> "'Excuse me, sir, Are you by any chance Lord Dudley?'
> 'As a matter of fact, old man, I am.'
> 'Then I must tell you that I am Inspector Hickman of the Nottingham CID.'
> 'In that case, old man, I am not Lord Dudley.'"

However, the most immediate models for Gorse were not Heath or Smith but the earlier protagonists of Hamilton's fiction. He is descended from Rex or Andy in *The Siege of Pleasure*, Mr Eccles in *The Plains of Cement*, or Peter in *Hangover Square*.

Hamilton wrote three of the four projected novels, assuring his readers throughout that Gorse was proceeding towards "a very curious destination in life", that he was to achieve great popular notoriety for his crimes and that "he was to die painlessly and quickly. And he was not to do this in bed." After the events of Gorse's childhood and adolescence, the youthful thefts in Reading, he has already appeared in *The News of the World* as an "unknown assailant" when the novel of that title begins. Indeed, Hamilton refers to the dénouement of this third (and, as it turned out, final) part as "a *News of the World* story".

There was a good deal of nervousness on the part of Hamilton's first publisher—Michael Sadleir of Constable & Co.—and certain reviewers as to the nature of the Gorse trilogy. The central character is referred to several times as "satanic" and has not a vestige of redemption about him. In *The West Pier* it is not enough that he should swindle the naive and trusting beauty of the slums, Esther Downes, of all her savings. There is a special pleasure in leaving her without even the small change in her purse. Her trust is stupidity and she must be punished for it, humiliated to the last degree. Esther is stranded at a tea-room out in the country, unable to pay the bill for the meal ordered by the vanished Gorse or to buy a ticket to get her back to the Brighton slum in which she and her family live. In the third novel when the young barmaid, Ivy Barton, is tied up and abandoned in the countryside near Pangbourne, Gorse makes sure that he has taken the few shillings in her purse as well as her savings. By comparison with this, his particular deviation of tying up young women for his pleasure seems almost innocuous. Indeed, Hamilton took this in his stride with a nonchalance that might have caused unease to the readers of *Unknown Assailant* in 1955.

> "It is foolish to call this a perversion because, as every serious student of the general psychology of sex (who would be supported by any prostitute, or keeper or frequenter of brothels) knows, it is merely a rather emphasised form of the sadistic or masochistic relationship between man and woman, or if it comes to that, man and man, or woman and woman."

Those who admired the portrayal of the pathetic Esther Downes in *The West Pier* were right to do so. Yet Hamilton's universe is unpitying and intolerant of the victims. The women who run the tea-room take a scarcely concealed pleasure in the humiliation of Esther. The brutish father of Ivy Barton feels that it is worth being swindled himself in order to see his daughter cut down to size through the loss of her money and self-respect. Mr Barton is condemned in one of Hamilton's clipped narrative judgments on the second page as a "harsh, vain, grasping and embittered man". In the manner of Dickens, the novelist digs a pit of obloquy from which the character can never climb.

The series of Gorse novels is by no means an object-lesson in the criminal exploitation of working-class women by a public schoolboy gone bad. It is in the nature of Gorse that his victims should be female, but Mrs Plumleigh-Bruce, the colonel's widow of *Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse*, is his superior in social class as well as age. With inexhaustible ingenuity he robs her and humiliates her by a pretence of love—promises of marriage are always part of his scheme. Not only does the robbery leave her an object of amusement to her acquaintances, she gets no sympathy from the narrator either: "What Gorse had done, for about six months, improved Mrs Plumleigh-Bruce's character, manners and accent wonder-

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fully." But having fled to Worthing and begun to forget the lesson taught her, she becomes again the insufferable petty snob and domestic autocrat that she had been before the beneficial depredations wrought on her purse and her emotions by Gorse.

> "And Mrs Plumleigh-Bruce's rich, regal, mouthy, throaty, fruity, haughty and objectionable voice became a recognised noise in the wind and desolation of the hopeless and helpless sea-front."

Very little in the three volumes of Gorse suggests the philosophy of Hamilton the Marxist-Leninist. But the novelist plays an increasingly voluble role as commentator, even inventing criminologists who later commented on the case of Gorse and dismissing their findings. Gorse, in the narrator's view, is not the product of circumstances or of psychological misadventure. He is purely and simply evil. The term "satanic" is no cliché. As in almost all of Hamilton's writing, it is tried, tested, and fitted with precision in its place.

IF THE three novels remain disturbing, it is for the contempt shown to Gorse's victims. He is the necessary instrument of their self-knowledge. Esther Downes is punished for her ambitious beauty, Mrs Plumleigh-Bruce for her arrogance, Ivy Barton for her stupidity. Having tied her up on a remote wooded hill and informed her that he has taken her money, Gorse leaves Ivy with instructions that she is not to try freeing herself for half an hour, unless she wishes to "suffer". With a final "*Eauvoir*, madame. . . . French for goodbye, you know", he makes off, asking her if she thinks she can get free. "Yes. Goodbye", says the foolish girl to her unknown assailant, "And thank you very much indeed."

Evil on one side and folly on the other remain constant in these last novels. It would not be the least surprising to discover that Catholicism rather than Communism was their intellectual driving force. In fact it was not. But Hamilton had moved on from characters who set the teeth on edge to another aspect of the world as Browning saw it and summed it up in "Gold Hair". "Original Sin", he offered as the great preoccupation of his poetry, "The Corruption of Man's Heart".

"WE ARE ALL—as one of his own characters might say—in for a Good Read." Priestley's remark in his introduction to *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky* summarised in a sentence the strength of Hamilton's appeal as a novelist and the flaw that it represents in his reputation. His novels recalled a Dickensian topography and Zola's moral analysis of human psychology. Hamilton's narrative draws the reader on—James Agate in reviewing *Hangover Square* suggested that readers should make the novel last by rationing themselves to fifty pages at a time. But it was a narrative style little different from that of a hundred years earlier. To the modernism of the day, to the example of Bloomsbury or James Joyce, Hamilton failed to pay his dues. He wrote with allusions which the common reader would recognise but without what he regarded as bourgeois literary self-consciousness. Boots Library and its story-reading public rather than the Hawthornden Prize were the target at which he aimed. To make matters worse, he referred to himself as a writer of thrillers. Indeed he wrote thrillers—but only in the sense that *The Ring and the Book* and *The Duchess of Malfi* might be regarded as specimens of the genre.

The novel, as he practised its craft, was the greatest popular art-form in the history of human culture. Despite the endless quotation and misquotation of E. M. Forster's words, it existed first and foremost to tell a story. Hamilton told his stories in such a way that men and women ignored James Agate's caution and turned the pages of *Hangover Square* or *The West Pier* until the tale had been consumed in a single greedy feast. He wrote of the schizophrenic "tender murderer" George Harvey Bone, and the coldly psychopathic cheater of women, Ernest Ralph Gorse. It was as if, like Raymond Chandler, he chose to live on the wrong side of the literary tracks. Where else could such a writer be placed upon the library shelves but in the section marked "Crime" rather than "Fiction"? And "Crime" is expendable—among the first to go when shelf-room is scarce.

But tributes to his art took other forms, surprising in their origin and beyond doubt sincere. Claud Cockburn, a friend of Patrick Hamilton over many years and a fellow-member of the Communist Party, once received a personal warning from the head of the Party's Cultural Division. He was "seeing

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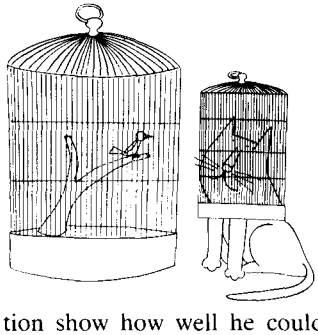
too much of Hamilton", whom the leaders of the Party now regarded as having Fascist connections and as being, in all probability, a Fascist spy.

The reason for this suspicion was the character of Peter, the arrogant and criminally convicted member of the British Union of Facists in *Hangover Square*. So powerful and authentic was the portrayal, said the Party, that "nobody could possibly reproduce exactly the manners, speech, outlook, and behaviour of a Fascist" as skilfully as Hamilton had done unless he had "the most intimate connections with the Blackshirts". There followed a series of "uproarious" meetings between Hamilton, Cockburn and the Party leaders; it was evident almost at once that Fascism was to Hamilton "the embodiment of all that he most hated".

But literary criticism takes many and unexpected forms. Contrary to the urgings of the politically committed, the ability to deceive and conceal in respect of his own beliefs is one of the coveted talents of a novelist. In all the tributes to Hamilton's literary genius, perhaps none pleased him more than that of the worried and suspicious Comrades.

A Quiet Place

"Readers" vs. "Students"—By BERNARD BERGONZI



ROBERT LOWELL'S *Collected Prose*, appearing ten years after his death, makes a distinguished volume.[1] Lowell, unlike such contemporaries as Delmore Schwartz and Randall Jarrell, had no ambition to be a systematic literary critic. But the occasional essays and reviews in the first part of the collection show how well he could write about poetry when he wanted to. Most of the subjects are American, and several of them were Lowell's friends, rivals and mentors. There are formal memorial essays on John Crowe Ransom, Jarrell, and John Berryman.

One of the earliest pieces is a brief study of Gerard Manley Hopkins, written in 1944, when Lowell was a Catholic convert and a young poet of tortured originality, treading in the footsteps of Eliot and Allen Tate. Later he abandoned Catholicism and enlarged his literary sympathies. He continued to admire Eliot intensely, though, and in an unfinished essay, "New England and Further", on which he was working when he died, Lowell wrote cryptically, "Eliot was abused as no other man, either American or British." At the same time, he could also write with love and admiration of William Carlos Williams, usually seen as the polar antithesis of Eliot in American cultural politics.

The studies of poets are personal and informal, reflecting Lowell's involvement with them, or their poetry. Though he had studied in the heartland of the New Criticism at Kenyon College, Lowell told an interviewer that he was "anxious in criticism *not* to do the standard analytical essay", preferring to be "much sloppier and intuitive". Lowell was casual rather than sloppy, and his best criticism is full of perceptive intuitions. There are curious, felicitous observations, such as his memory of Ransom's appearance:

> "Ransom's mouth was large and always in slow perceptive motion, quivering with tedium, or tighter-drawn to repel ignorant rudeness, giving an encouraging grimace, or relaxed, though busy in meditation. It was a mouth more expressive than the small, beautiful mouths of girls in his poems."

Closer to conventional criticism is Lowell's unexpectedly apt observation, in an early review of Dylan Thomas, that Thomas was heavily dependent on a handful of recurring words, so that "one is surprised that he has never written a sestina with *locks*, *keys*, *sun*, *grains*, *fire*, and *death* as the repeated words".

The most sustained and interesting criticism is contained in the long, incomplete essay "New England and Further". In its present form it is a series of linked, brief studies, sometimes only a few sentences long, of New England authors, beginning with Cotton Mather, and going on to Franklin, Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Lincoln (not, on the face of it, a New Englander), J. R. Lowell (Robert's great-grand-uncle), Longfellow, Melville, James, Henry Adams, Emily Dickinson, Santayana, Frost, Stevens and, finally, Eliot (though Eliot was as much a kind of Southerner as a New Englander). How Lowell would have developed this essay is not at all clear, but it seems as if he was exploring and indeed establishing a literary tradition in which he, as the latest and certainly one of the most distinguished of New England writers, could find an honoured place. There is an implicitly autobiographical note here, and in some of Lowell's pieces on his contemporaries—notably the memorial for John Berryman, who took his life five years before Lowell himself died, and is now seen as Lowell's peer and rival in the poetic encounter with extremity.

A new intensity is evident in Lowell's later prose, but the writing remains coherent and idiosyncratically lucid, despite what we know of his recurring mental disturbance. Indeed,

[1] *Collected Prose*. By ROBERT LOWELL. Edited by ROBERT GIROUX. Farrar, Straus, Giroux, $25.00; Faber & Faber, £17.50.

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the prose, early or late, is consistently pleasurable to read. The *Collected Prose* also contains Lowell's interviews with Frederick Seidel and Ian Hamilton, and some explicitly autobiographical pieces. One of them, "91 Revere Street", a delightfully sharp and humorous recreation of his Boston childhood, was previously published in the American but not the British edition of *Life Studies*. The others, "Antebellum Boston" and "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium", are published for the first time. The last of these dispassionately recalls one of Lowell's periods of hospitalisation for mental illness. Lowell's career swung between the Dionysiac and the Apollonian; in his prose the Dionysiac makes its presence felt, but the Apollonian remains in charge.

LOWELL WAS OLD ENOUGH to recall the early excitement of the New Criticism, and in one of his essays he contrasts it favourably with the professionalism of the academy, which had already depressed Randall Jarrell when he wrote "An Age of Criticism" in the mid-1950s. In 1962 Lowell wrote, in conscious allusion to *The Dunciad*:

> "Dullness and the sad, universal air of the graduate school have descended on close literary criticism. Once it was far otherwise. I can remember when the early essays on *The Waste Land*, the first editions of the Brooks and Warren *Understanding Poetry*, and Blackmur's pieces on Stevens and Marianne Moore came as a revelation. The world was being made anew."

Lowell was then looking back 25 years. Another 25 years on, it is evident that he was writing at a watershed in intellectual history. At that time, the old New Criticism was moving from maturity to desiccation, and alien forms of life were stirring in France, soon to thrust the tentacles of structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction into the American graduate schools, and then into English studies globally.

When Jarrell and Lowell wrote, criticism was taking over from literature, and they didn't like the process. Now, in many places, critical theory is taking over from literature; the "sloppy, intuitive" approach favoured by Lowell is likely to seem remote, incredible, and even faintly disgusting to systematic theorists. In the golden dawn of the New Criticism to which Lowell looked back so fondly, the leading practitioners, with the exception of Cleanth Brooks, were also poets: Ransom, Tate, Warren, Blackmur, Winters, with Jarrell and Schwartz as younger exemplars. But they had no successors of comparable stature. Criticism moved away from the producers of literature and into the academy, which was more concerned with the production of "research".

The partial triumph of critical theory means that it is now possible to hold an esteemed place in a university English department, not only without being able to write literature, which has never been a *sine qua non* for the good critic, but without liking it very much or being particularly interested in it. The split between production and theory is nicely illustrated in a story about the eminent Russian linguistician Roman Jakobson, who is said to have resisted a proposal to give Vladimir Nabokov a chair of Slavonic literature at Harvard, saying that it would be like asking a cow to manage a dairy.

HAPPILY, THE DIVISION is far from complete. John Bayley once published a novel, though so far it remains an isolated effort. But no one can doubt his love of literature, and not only English literature. As his latest collection of essays and reviews shows, Russian literature is as valuable in his scheme of things as English and American. It is called *The Order of Battle at Trafalgar*,[2] which may cause unwary librarians to shelve it among books on naval history. Bayley can, I think, be pardoned this amiable affectation; the title of the eponymous essay comes from a wish once expressed by Lionel Trilling for "a quiet place" where the modern intellectual can take a silent rest from expressing opinions, and instead "*know* something—in what year the Parthenon was begun, the order of battle at Trafalgar, how Linear B was deciphered: almost anything that has nothing to do with the talkative and attitudinising present."

Bayley remarks in this short but weighty essay that the situation is worse now than when Trilling wrote. For many of the brightest and best minds currently engaged in literary

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[2] *The Order of Battle at Trafalgar and Other Essays*. By JOHN BAYLEY. Collins Harvill, £12.00.

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study it makes no sense to talk of literature presenting us with the reality of things, since there is no such reality. Textual codes direct us not to things, but to other codes. In such a climate, Bayley suggests, critics can progress from merely commenting on the game from the sidelines to actually generating the codes of which it is composed. Bayley, like Trilling, sees knowledge of the past as disinterested, to be pursued for its own sake.

They are surely right to do so. The past, that foreign country where they do things differently, can in a literal and refreshing sense take one's mind off the present. Though once we move from knowing things to the historical interpretation of them we cannot but be caught up again in the concerns of the present. But that too many people do not know enough, have insufficient ballast to their thinking, seems to me undeniable. Many of those who go around invoking History don't know any history, though the mind-set of many young literary intellectuals, drawn substantially from Foucault, disablingly denies that there is such a thing as disinterested knowledge: if we want to know about the decipherment of Linear B or the order of battle at Trafalgar it is because knowledge is power, and knowing these things gives us dominance over other people.

Bayley makes a case for traditional humanism effectively enough in his rather gnomic way, and it is impossible not to be on his side. He throws out, in passing, a nice point about Julian Barnes's admirable novel, *Flaubert's Parrot*. The book has been assumed, in a post-modernist, post-structuralist spirit, to show the total relativity of knowledge and the inaccessibility of the "real" past. In practice, Bayley suggests, the book works the other way, giving a new sense of the substantiality of the historical Flaubert and the parrot which he had on his desk while writing *Un Coeur Simple*.

One of Bayley's best essays is a sympathetic account of Todorov's *The Poetics of Prose*. He shows how Todorov, while apparently subjecting James's short stories to a purely formal analysis, produces, without comment, an unmistakably moral meaning to the narrative. Bayley acknowledges the value of classical formalism of Todorov's kind. The reader, deeply moved by a major literary work, may not respond in anything like the spirit in which the author wrote, since his principal concern may seem formal, technical, rhetorical, game-playing, rather than the direct communication of feeling, though it gets communicated anyway. "No sensible person", Bayley remarks, "supposes that Shakespeare shed tears as he worked on *Lear*, or after he finished it."

He provides a sharper discussion of Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, that best-selling farrago of lucid exposition and japing provocation. Bayley, upholding the ideal of the disinterested reader who loves literature for its own sake, rejects Eagleton's implication that the people who read it will be "literary students or critics", who are inevitably in the grip of theory and ideology, often unacknowledged. Bayley comments, "At once a gap opens, which Eagleton ignores, between the reader of literature and the 'student' of it." The gap is there all right, and Bayley's instinct is to place himself on the ordinary reader's side of it. Yet Bayley is not, professionally speaking, an ordinary reader, or even a man of letters and critic on the traditional model. As the Thomas Warton Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford, he is a prominent member of that university's English Faculty, as is Terry Eagleton, and they both work on the professional side of the gap. The difference is that Eagleton is prepared to go along with Roland Barthes's dictum that "literature is what gets taught", whereas Bayley resists it.

Bayley's ideal of a realm of pure, joyful literary study, existing apart from the pressures of the modern academy, which is itself subject to the hostile pressures of the larger society, is noble and not to be lightly abandoned. Yet his prodigious and enthusiastic reading in literature tends not to recognise such pressures. Bayley has a sense of the world as being as rich and wonderfully diverse as literature itself, and yet basically simple. Reviewing his *Selected Essays* here three years ago, I wrote, "His single-minded concentration on literature itself is admirable, but disconcertingly context-less", and the comment applies to the present collection.

What Bayley ignores and Eagleton takes as a starting point is the extent to which the academic institutionalising of literary study nearly a hundred years ago, and the expansion of that process throughout the world, has affected the perception of literature and the nature of criticism itself. Academics, as Lowell and many others have pointed out, write a different kind of criticism from poets. The modern academic is expected to engage in "research" if he is to keep his job, still more advance in his career; and the essence of research—with the physical sciences providing an invisible model—is to keep coming up with something new. "Make it New!" Pound exclaimed, with poets in mind. When academic critics take over this slogan they are caught up in restless shifts from one intellectual fashion to another, and then in the big leap from doing criticism to doing critical theory, which means that literature itself can be forgotten about, or denied reality and value.

Bayley dislikes all this, and so do I, but he does not recognise the extent to which the structures of his profession, and mine, have made it inevitable. Incidentally, given his devotion to the value of precise knowledge, he should not mind if I correct him on a small point about the development of English studies. He writes that George Gordon, Professor of English Literature at Oxford in the 1920s, claimed that "England is sick. . . . English literature must save it". In fact, Gordon claimed no such thing. He was a robust reactionary who rejected the Arnoldian idea of the salvific power of literary study. In his inaugural lecture he summarised these notions, only to mock and reject them. Bayley picks up the error from Eagleton, who in turn was quoting from someone else, not directly from Gordon.

In the remainder of his book Bayley turns from these questions of theory and principle to the novelists and poets, in whose company he is more at home. Many of the essays suffer from the short-windedness of reprinted reviews, and the

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obliquities and subtleties of Bayley's manner mean they have to be carefully tuned into. Yet the collection is rewarding, particularly in the many pieces on Russian literature, from Tolstoy to Joseph Brodsky. Knowing the language, and being so widely read in it, Bayley makes an excellent job of mediating the fascinating "otherness" of Russian writing—analogous to the otherness of the past, perhaps—to the anglophone reader. At one point he draws back from the discussion of particular authors to offer an enlightening summary.

> "Query: what categories do Russian writers most neatly divide into? Answer: shamans and schoolmasters. Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky enchant their audience like magicians, work upon them like wizards. Belinsky, Tolstoy, Solzhenitsyn sit their readers down in the classroom, take up a piece of chalk, and proceed to draw great sweeping diagrams upon the blackboard."

MALCOLM BRADBURY, like John Bayley, is a critic who works in a university. But whereas Bayley does his best to ignore or conceal the system he is part of, Bradbury frequently focuses on it. One should say, more accurately, "systems", since he rotates hats rapidly: he is a Professor of American Studies, a critic, a reviewer, a novelist, an editor, a prize judge, a TV script-writer. Bradbury's most famous novel, *The History Man*, was about systems and how to work them, and the same preoccupation is apparent in his new collection of essays, *No, Not Bloomsbury*.[3] It is a substantial volume, focusing on modern British writing, particularly fiction; a second collection, due to appear next year, will contain studies of American and Continental writers.

Bradbury is much given, in the words of the old pop song, to "Talking About My Generation" and, quite apart from its other qualities, *No, Not Bloomsbury* provides a useful guide to the progress of English fiction since the 1950s, at the end of which decade Bradbury published his first novel, *Eating People is Wrong*. But the best and most revealing essay is the introductory one called "Writer and Critic", in which Bradbury considers the relations between imaginative writing and literary criticism in the present phase of our culture, and then gives the discussion a quasi-autobiographical turn by showing how he deals with these two aspects of his own literary persona. This is a splendidly witty essay, which acknowledges that the relationship is basically schizophrenic, and concludes by seeing it as a difficult but reluctantly persisting marriage. The discussion relates interestingly to parts of Bayley's, as when Bradbury remarks:

> "Writers do not really want to be analysed and put on record. They simply want to be totally and entirely *understood*, wordlessly valued for their irreducible perfection. In this, of course, they are just like the rest of us."

Bradbury's tone is evasive. He is ready to make jokes about the current gurus of the academy, but what Bayley resists, Bradbury tends to accept, as the way things are. In practice, the division within himself between the critic and the writer seems to be one that he can live with quite comfortably.

This opening essay is followed by two others of general literary speculation, on the relations between contemporary writing and painting, and on the present as an "age of parody". They are full of interest and ideas, though intermittently marred by Bradbury's tendency to work at a vulnerably high level of cultural generalisation. The rest of the collection is arranged in a loosely literary-historical way to discuss British writing from the 1940s to the present.

Bradbury's arguments are conducted, it seems to me, in terms of two different schemata, which do not work together very easily. The first is concerned with modernism and its aftermath, implicitly in terms of an entropic running-down; the entropy model is noticeable in post-modernist fiction. In this perspective the neo-Realistic British writing of the 1950s—the era of the Movement and the Angry Young Men—represents decline, a collapse after the high energies of modernism had been expended, a return to convention and a regressive sense of the past.

This was the way unsympathetic critics saw it at the time, and in places Bradbury comes close to this view; he is a great respector of modernism and has no inclination to diminish its achievements. Nevertheless, his loyalty to his generation provides another and conflicting model, which represents the 1950s as a period when strong if insular literary talents emerged in England.

[3] *No, Not Bloomsbury*. By MALCOLM BRADBURY. André Deutsch, £17.95.

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The clash is illustrated in the juxtaposition of two essays. One is on Malcolm Lowry, applauding *Under the Volcano*, a long-gestated masterpiece of modernist fiction, appearing, improbably, in the late 1940s. The following essay is a sympathetic and admiring study of C. P. Snow and William Cooper, whose work embodied the spirit of the '50s: opposition to literary modernism, a concern for man as a social being, and traditional concepts of character and story-telling. Snow and Cooper are unlikely to have had much time for Lowry, but Bradbury writes of them all in the same broadly approving tone. Undoubtedly his ideas have changed and developed during the many years in which these essays were written, but they are reprinted without dates of publication, and have been revised in the attempt to create a seemingly homogeneous and sustained study, but without concealing shifts in attitude.

"I have never much liked realism", he remarked in a recent piece, which is not what he used to say. An explicit dialogue between the Bradbury of the '50s and the Bradbury of the '80s might have made a lively way of dealing with the problem. Some of his best studies do in fact hint at such a dialogue, when they discuss novelists who first made their reputations in the '50s and have continued to develop creatively ever since, moving in the process from ostensible realism and social comedy to pastiche, fantasy, and a consciousness of the terrors and disturbances that undermine the safe existence of "man in society" on the 1950s model. Kingsley Amis and Angus Wilson are notable examples, on both of whom Bradbury writes well. The implicit parallel with his own development as a novelist is unmistakable.

ONE ESSAY, inserted rather incongruously among the studies of novelists, is on F. R. Leavis, seen as a major contributor to that by now somewhat mythicised cultural climate of the 1950s: insular, provincial, non-conformist, empirical, decent, down-to-earth. Bradbury writes admiringly of Leavis, who influenced his own origins as a critic, as he did so many of that generation. But by now he is far from being a Leavisite critic. Bradbury's literary sympathies are so broad as to exclude very little, and he avoids making unfavourable judgments where possible, generally preferring exposition and interpretation to evaluation.

This may to some extent be a function of Bradbury's present position as a distinguished academic. Cambridge English, in the days of Richards and Leavis and the beginnings of *Scrutiny*, found evaluating as natural as breathing, and that state of mind is still apparent in many an ageing Leavisite academic or schoolmaster. But "English" in its present globally expanded state goes for interpretation rather than judgment; the underlying assumption is that if a text is good enough to have canonical status there isn't much point in questioning that status. There is a relevant comment by John Bayley on a Dostoevsky scholar he is reviewing:

> "While Dr Miller has much that is of interest to say about *The Idiot*, she does not quite persuade one that it comes off, indeed she does not really try, because like many scholars today she is more concerned with showing how the thing works, than with judging if it works well."

Some of Bradbury's criticism reads rather like a publicity handout for modern English fiction, in a deeply un-Scrutineering spirit; the model may be partly that of the British Council lecture delivered in foreign parts, where the lecturer aims to tell the audience in straightforward terms about "what has been going on lately in the novel", and at the same time to provide some discreet patriotic hyping of the product. He is given to curiously formulaic accolades, which have the invariability of epic diction: "Iris Murdoch is unmistakably one of our great contemporary novelists"; "Muriel Spark is one of our finest and surest modern novelists"; on John Fowles, "I consider him one of our great writers"; "Burgess is one of our most likeable writers"; on William Golding, "one of our greatest postwar novelists"; on D. M. Thomas, "one of our best contemporary writers".

This formulaic tendency is related to another, in that Bradbury's critical prose tends to the condition of the rapid list, whether of proper names, or attributes, or concepts, usually illustrative of the present or pending condition of our culture. This does not make for good writing, and suggests little of the acute linguistic sensitivity that marks *Rates of Exchange*, or the parodies in *Who Do You Think You Are?* In a vigorous, personal piece about the problems of working for television Bradbury remarks of the medium: "Out of it all comes a little that is good, a fair amount that is bad, and a general level of technical competence so impressive that it is quite often hard to tell the difference." This makes, sharply and accurately, the kind of point that tends not to be often made in his writing on fiction. Here, as elsewhere in the book, we are hearing the voice of the Writer rather than the Critic. On the whole, the Writer writes better.

BENEDICT NIGHTINGALE'S *Fifth Row Center*[4] is something of a curiosity. Subtitled *A Critic's Year On and Off Broadway*, it is of American provenance, as the spelling of the title implies—the British edition of a book first published last year in the United States. But the author is English, and it presents the journal of the year (1983-84) that Nightingale spent as visiting theatre critic for the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*.

He faced a number of problems, not the least being that it was an exceptionally dull time in the New York theatre, when few interesting new plays were put on, or, if they were put on, did not stay on. Another problem was that, on the whole, Nightingale preferred British plays and actors to American ones, and was rather embarrassed by his preference, so he leans over backward where he can to say good things about American products. In his journal he ranges widely, moving beyond plays and players to reflect on the impossible economics of Broadway, where plays have to show instant success or come off at once. The ultimate insane logic of the system would be for plays to be put on for an audience of one man,

[4] *Fifth Row Center: A Critic's Year On and Off Broadway*. By BENEDICT NIGHTINGALE. André Deutsch, £12.95.

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who had paid several million dollars for his seat. Here the market is visibly failing art, though whatever quasi-Marxist reflections are triggered off by this dismal state of affairs have to be tempered by what Nightingale has to say about the part absurdly high labour costs and restrictive practices have played in bringing it about.

He is a wonderfully readable writer, whatever he touches on, who combines a capacity for strict judgment with an endless enthusiasm for the theatre. It takes no small talent to make one interested in reading accounts of plays that not only has one never seen, but has not heard of; and, judging from what he says of them, would not much want to see even if the opportunity arose. He is concerned about the way recent American theatre has retreated to narrowly personal themes, family conflicts, legacies of a blighted childhood. He complains, "You begin to get the feeling that all that matters to American playwrights is self-discovery, self-fulfilment, and the ravelled relationships of husband and wife, lover and lover, father and son, mother and daughter, mother and son, brother and brother, sister and. . . ."

A general point is surely being made here about American culture at large, and not seeing these plays is something I can bear with great equanimity. As Robert Lowell said to one of his interviewers, "Isn't it a backache to sit through a whole play?" Yet Nightingale's energy and cheerfulness remain impressively unabated, whatever he has to sit through.

The Imperative of Usefulness

Recent Poetry—By John Mole

Some poets rise to the top of the bowl, magical and wholesome as yeast, and Bertolt Brecht, who died just over twenty years ago, is certainly one of them. "Grub first, then ethics", he once declared, unarguably voicing the one responsible and realistic priority, but in his own work the two are simultaneous, and the ethical richness of his poetry is what makes its nourishment so variously appealing. "Why should my name be mentioned?" asks the title of a poem. "Because I praised the useful/Which in my day was considered base" answers the text. Throughout his writing life, Brecht was committed to *Gebrauchslyrik*—"of all the works of man I like best/Those which have been used" and "useful works/*require people*":

> *Who gives works duration?*
> *Those who'll be alive then.*
> *Whom to choose as builders?*
> *Those still unborn.*
>
> *Do not ask what they will be like. But*
> *Determine it.*

Reading Brecht again in the long-awaited and revised paperback edition of *Poems 1913-1956*,[1] first published in 1976 and the combined achievement of 34 translators, including John Willett (one of the volume's editors) and Michael Hamburger, is to recognise that his vast output is unified by that germinating core of instruction which is still too often mistaken for mere didacticism. "The truth is concrete" runs his favourite quotation from Hegel, and his compassionate, stubborn, contentious imagination is firmly located in modest routine and in a heightened sense of the occasional which measures history in terms of what we do to, and for, each other on a daily basis against a darkening backdrop of discredited ideologies.

With an invigorating mixture of humility and conscience-ridden self-denial, Brecht's poetry is all the time questioning the validity of its own utterance. What are these games, these plots, these rhymes that its perpetrator is up to? A consummate, though often unobtrusive, technician he undoubtedly is, but there are several fascinating stages in his career where he quarrels with his own gifts and in doing so only demonstrates them the more forcefully. "What kind of times are they, when/A talk about trees is almost a crime/Because it implies silence about so many horrors?"

The answer is, surely, the kind of times (then as now) that need Brecht's way of talking about trees. "Concerning Spring", for example, is no crime. Like all his finest lyrical pieces, it is light-years from being the gentle notations of a solitary. It's a firm, responsible and necessary celebration of life vividly at odds with its cadences of loss and deprivation, a lyricism which embodies Brecht's instinctive Marxism, too, in that it seems magnificently communal, collective and inclusive:

> *Long before*
> *We swooped on oil, iron and ammonia*
> *There was each year*
> *A time of irresistible violent leafing of trees*
> *We all remember*

[1] *Poems 1913-1956*. By Bertolt Brecht. Edited by John Willett and Ralph Manheim. Methuen, £6.95.

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Lengthened days
Brighter sky
Change of the air
The certainly arriving Spring.
We still read in books
About this celebrated season
Yet for a long time now
Nobody has seen above our cities
The famous flocks of birds
Spring is noticed, if at all
By people sitting in railway trains.
The plains show it
In its old clarity.
High above, it is true
There seem to be storms:
All they touch now is
Our aerials.

What shines through *Poems 1913-1956* is that ironic point of light at the tip of his big cigar, to which Brecht drew a nicely self-dramatising attention in "Of Poor BB" in the middle 1920s and which went on glowing as the night closed in with its long knives and the terrible ascendency of the house-painter. Like Auden's ironic points of light in "September 1939"—a poem I've always felt owes much to Brecht and belongs in the company of both poets' best—it flashes out "wherever the just/Exchange their messages". Whether Brecht is urging actors to visit "that theatre whose setting is the street" because it is useful, serious, funny and, most of all, dignified, or whether he is contemplating his own survival—

I know of course: it's simply luck
That I've survived so many friends. But last night in a dream
I heard those friends say of me: "Survival of the fittest"
And I hated myself

—he weighs his words exactly in a careful balance between the present and those perspectives of "distant times"—past and future—which gives him a proper sense of his own vulnerability.

They give an edge, too, to a poetry which is always on the move because it dare not stay in one place for too long. In the world as it is there are no consoling absolutes outside the scope of human responsibility. Although many of his transcriptions of the natural world are luminously exact, he never forgets for one moment that "beyond the village the elms still bow their fine branches/Gracefully to the man abusing a child". That adverb displays all the courtesy of a profound indifference.

By the end of his life Brecht was an experienced exile, schooled in *Realpolitik*, and a wily internal émigré. He had become a master of the extended ballad, the orchestrated sequence and the allegorical fable, but many of his finest poems are deceptively short—part of their utility factor—and in his last years he makes memorably plain statements, summations which nevertheless in their blend of conscience, fatalism and hope, their celebration of a fragile provisional security, and their self-admonition, address themselves unequivocally to the future: "Everything changes. You can make/A fresh start with your final breath." For Brecht, the observation is an imperative, and of these later poems "A New House"—from *Poems of Reconstruction*—is outstanding:

Back in my country after fifteen years of exile
I have moved into a fine house.
Here I have hung
My No masks and picture scroll representing the Doubter.
Every day, as I drive through the ruins, I am reminded
Of the privileges to which I owe this house. I hope
It will not make me patient with the holes
In which so many thousands huddle. Even now
On top of the cupboard containing my manuscripts
My suitcase lies.

The last sentence bears witness to Brecht's central importance. He is among the great poets of the century, in one of his own often-used words "exemplary", and a warning to us all never to entrust our suitcases to the guardians of any system of belief, however attractive their promises or flattering their attention to our immediate needs.

Like Bertolt Brecht, William Carlos Williams is a poet committed to the utility factor. As Marianne Moore wrote in a review of his *Adam and Eve in the City* (recently reprinted in her *Complete Prose*[2]): ". . . he is honest, prompt to submit his premise, serious to the point of bitterness, compassionate; ruled by affection and the compulsion to usefulness." She might just as well have been characterising Brecht, and indeed in his study *The Truth of Poetry* Michael Hamburger makes the comparison direct:

> "Only one other twentieth-century poet I can think of, William Carlos Williams, succeeded as well as Brecht in integrating his poetic and social selves to the extent of really overcoming the Romantic-Symbolist dichotomies. Both became masters of the seemingly off-hand, seemingly effortless manner that leaves no gaps between the thing said and the way of saying it, between what the poem enacts and the person who enacts it. Of the two, Williams was by far the more sensuous and visual poet, and he presented 'images' rather than moralities; both poets made a new purity out of the very stuff which most of their predecessor poets had condemned in advance as impure, because it was ordinary and workaday."

Carcanet's handsome new edition of Williams's *Collected Poems 1909-1939*[3] is the first in a two-volume edition of the poetry (excluding *Paterson*) in which the editors reverse the poet's decision to put his work in thematic order, thereby restoring the original order of publication and providing the opportunity for a reassessment. What we find is a poet in-

[2] *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*. Edited by Patricia C. Willis. Faber, £30.00.
[3] *The Collected Poems 1909-1939*. By William Carlos Williams. Edited by A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan. Carcanet, £18.95

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tent on shedding artifice, and as suspicious as Brecht of any theatre which is not the street. Certainly his earliest work is often romantically arch in its diction (quite a bit of fleeing and pangs) but it is never less than firmly crafted with remarkably little puppy fat on the bones. The celebrated phrase "No ideas/but in things" is the scope of his ambition writ small, just as an intimation of "the universality of things"

> *draws me toward the candy*
> *with melon flowers that open*
>
> *about the edge of refuse*
> *proclaiming without accent*
> *the quality of the farmer's*
>
> *shoulders and his daughter's*
> *accidental skin, so sweet*
> *with clover and the small*
>
> *yellow cinquefoil in the*
> *parched places.*

It is that proclamation "without accent" which becomes the hallmark of Williams's work—a poetry in which the candy, the refuse, the farmer's daughter and the wonderful passing detail of her "accidental skin" are noted in a precise and equable synthesis which transcribes the variousness of things with no word wasted.

The achieved Williams voice is instant, astonished, full of a finely tuned amazement. His exclamation marks are emphatic but never shrill, and there's a generous impersonality about his inclusive method which amounts to a kind of gracious bowing-out from the scene of his observation. Sometimes, as in "The Young Housewife", he seems almost to be parodying the romantic image of the passing observer, but whereas, for example, Wordsworth appropriates the song of his Solitary Reaper, bearing it in his heart with solemn emphasis, Williams applies a gentle pressure to the accelerator and moves on to the next street corner and the next poem. The song is the momentum of the street; and the poet's responsibility is to become a part of it, involved but invisible. And as for the enigmatic smile at the end, it seems the poem's own contented purr at Williams's restraint, at his letting a small, unrepeatable moment have its way:

> *At ten A.M. the young housewife*
> *moves about in negligée behind*
> *the wooden walls of her husband's house.*
> *I pass solitary in my car.*
>
> *Then again she comes to the curb*
> *to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands*
> *shy, uncorseted, tucking in*
> *stray ends of hair, and I compare her*
> *to a fallen leaf.*
>
> *The noiseless wheels of my car*
> *rush with a crackling sound over*
> *dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.*

Small wonder that in a heavily adjectival extract by Randall Jarrell, quoted on the cover of this new edition, the greatest weight is given to "democratic". Williams's poetry, like

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Brecht's, offers a working model of human life rather than a self-congratulatory reflection. As he writes in *Spring and All*:

> "I suppose Shakespeare's familiar aphorism about holding the mirror up to nature has done more harm in stabilising the copyist tendency of the arts among us than—
>
> the mistake in it (though we forget that it is not S. speaking but an imaginative character of his) is to have believed that the reflection of nature is nature. It is not. It is only a sham nature, a 'lie'.
>
> Of course S. is the most conspicuous example desirable of the falseness of this very thing.
>
> He holds no mirror up to nature but with his imagination rivals nature's composition with his own.
>
> He himself become 'nature'—continuing 'its' marvels—if you will. . . ."

And in the earlier "The Wanderer: A Rococo Study" this central preoccupation can be seen developing in the exclamation: "How shall I be a mirror to this modernity?", with the emphasis, again, on being and becoming—on achieving what Michael Hamburger calls the "seemingly effortless manner that leaves no gaps between the thing said and the way of saying it" which can only be done by smashing the frame of literary tradition and carrying off the glass.

It is absorbing to follow this risky and courageous adventure through the pages of *Collected Poems 1919-1939*, to watch a poet attempting to "become nature", failing when he merely notes down what he sees with a randomness which doesn't cohere, then suddenly discovering in his language the "bite of the actual" which makes it new. After 1939 Williams started the experiments that led to the longer works, and finally to *Paterson*. These experiments, though not their final outcome, will be in the next volume. An event to look forward to. It will continue the marvels.

In 1938, ONE YEAR BEFORE Williams began those experiments, Laura Riding gave up writing poetry altogether, renouncing it with a fervent sternness which—in her various subsequent attempts to explain why she did so—has almost amounted to a denunciation. Apparently she believes that poetry has failed her kind of seriousness and can offer no absolute resolution: "The universal linguistic solution hangs suspended in poetry, and so long as it does, human beings cannot know what kind of beings they are, cannot speak themselves with whole consciousness of their being speaking beings, and what this lays upon them to require of themselves."[4] It is as if she were claiming that poetry is a deceptive quest that gets you nowhere fast:

> *By crude rotation—*
> *It might be as a water-wheel*
> *Is stumbled and the blindfolded ox*
> *Makes forward freshly with each step*
> *Upon the close habitual path—*
> *To my lot fell a blindness*
> *That was but a blindedness,*
> *And then an inexpressive heart,*
> *And next a want I did not know of what*
> *Through blindedness and inexpressiveness*
> *Of heart.*
>
> *To my lot fell*
> *By trust, false signs, fresh starts,*
> *A slow speed and a heavy reason,*
> *A visibility of blindedness—these thoughts—*
> *And then content, the language of the mind*
> *That knows no way to stop.*

It is hard to avoid feeling, when comparing the urgency, animation and subtlety of those lines with the inert strictures of the prose comments that poetry has become the scapegoat for Laura Riding's own intellectual overload, that she gave up poetry as the only way of stopping a take-over by "the language of the mind" (which must, by definition, be self-generating and endlessly exploratory), and that her subsequent obsession with "truth-telling" has been the restlessness of a brilliant mind chasing its own tail.

Instead of the bite of the actual we get the snap of frustration—a magisterial snap, but one which cannot disguise the source of its discontent in the failure of artistic nerve. Riding's polemical voice is wilfully unattractive, with a kind of MENSA exclusivity. Admirably committed to mind-expansion, believing as she did for a time in the "implications of a general human potentiality secreted in the poetic demonstration", she nevertheless gives the impression of holding a lofty contempt for mere mortals every time she adds a further layer of explanation to her copious introductions and appendices.

However, this proud emphasis upon failure—upon complex and often unfathomable reasons for dismissing the "false weight of authority attached to the term 'ordinary', in contexts of reference to human behaviour"—while it leads one to suspect that she would give little credence to the humane achievements of Brecht and Williams, should not go on reflecting on her own poetry. It's high time this fine body of work leapt free of its author's denigration and the paraphernalia of her rhetoric. The best way to approach this new paperback edition of her poems would be to seal off all the surrounding apologia and analysis, and come to it without prejudice or fear of its legendary "difficulty". It will charge every reader's imagination with the responsibility of thinking big:

> *To the microscopy of thinking small*
> *(To have room enough to think at all)*
> *I said, "Cramped mirror, faithful constriction,*
> *Break, be large as I."*
>
> *Then I heard little leaves in my ears rustling*
> *And a little wind like a leaf blowing*
> *My mind into a corner of my mind,*
> *Where wind over empty ground went blowing*
> *And a large dwarf picked and picked up nothing.*

[4] *The Poems of Laura Riding*. By LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON. Carcanet, £5.95.

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Everything comes of nothing and nothing of everything. The more Laura Riding races over the switch-back of her own paradoxes, the more engrossing her poetry becomes. She negotiates that "crossed estate/Where reason's loud with nonsense/And nonsense soft with truth".

It's the condition of her reality and the landmark of her *own* truth. She claims that the American reviewer Schuyler B. Jackson (who later became her husband) let "the cat of trouble-ahead out of the bag" when he wrote of her that "language that would seem clear in Shakespeare or Mother Goose may seem obscure in Laura Riding". In the short term, maybe, but that term has lasted long enough. All serious readers of poetry expect the cat to jump over the moon and are disappointed if it doesn't. The last thing they want is for it to sit on the wall complaining that there never *was* a moon after all. What Laura Riding's poetry requires is the innocence of a fresh start. Its absolute authenticity will do the rest.

THE CENTRAL SECTION of Anne Stevenson's *Selected Poems 1956-1986*,[5] "Correspondences", takes up over a third of the book's length. It's an historical narrative in verse letters (and a variety of forms) in which between 1829 and 1972 several generations of an American family write to each other—admonishing, encouraging, advising and reproaching. They win and lose, leave home, marry, divorce, cross borders between the North and South (geographically and temperamentally), negotiate between the Puritan morality with its work-ethic ("Work is next to Godliness; a man should keep books when dealing with the Deity"); the delights of frivolity ("Frivolity is an armor of lace/against the mind's inner vengeance and poisons"); and the encroaching dissolution of "*Civitas Mundi*":

> *"New England is dissolving like a green chemical.*
> *Old England bleeds out to meet it in mid-ocean.*
> *Nowhere is safe."*

This enterprise is an epistolary saga, an oblique and poignant narrative which develops a cumulative force of mood and attitude. It is also, of course, interesting in that the many branches of the Chandler Family, whose genealogy amounts to an intricate fiction, are, of course, the stock of Anne Stevenson's imagination.

In the first letter of Part One, Adam Chandler, reverend father of all that follows, rebukes his daughter for preferring "the precarious apartments of the world/to the safer premises of the spirit", and in the last letter of all the poet Kay Boyd—born in 1932, one year before Anne Stevenson—writes back from England to *her* father in America, describing herself as living "a long way from Eden. The tug back/is allegiance to innocence which is not there".

In her subsequent collections, considering her own life, her uneasy but determined commitment to putting down roots in England, Anne Stevenson thrives on a creative tension between "now" and "then", between the historical past—her New England origins—and a present of "contemporary voice and dislocation". Flux and change are stemmed by family love, loyalty to friends and a celebration of seasonal recurrence but an anxious sense of vacancy is never far from the surface. In "Transparencies" the writer of "Correspondences" sends a letter to her sons in which a more modern, alienated, self-doubting sententiousness wavers between rejection and continuity—a contemporary Eve pained but fascinated by the consequences of her exile:

> *This is a letter I'd never write if I could*
> *send you counsel. Cicero, Polonius—thistles*
> *preaching their beards to their blown seed. Oh,*
> *it's your particular selves I need to hold*
> *to the light as you cross the impossible lens of now*
> *and now. Solid enough to believe . . . until*
> *the river ripples under your melting faces*
> *mouthing at me from its thin windows.*

THE TITLE OF P. J. Kavanagh's New and Selected Poems, *Presences*,[6] comes from one of the small selection of new poems entitled "Late Acknowledgement":

> *We never know whom we shall miss.*
> *Some deaths leave a gap that heals over*
> *But others leave presences.*

Like Geoffrey Grigson, whose gift for precise natural observation was inseparable from his fine sense of mortality, Kavanagh finds his poems are full of ghosts, and several of the most moving of them—such as "One" and the deeply affecting "Beyond Decoration"—recall his father, and his first wife who died at a tragically early age. These ghosts are benign, if often desolating, presences constantly alerting Kavanagh to a keen apprehension of loss and transience in the midst of the natural world:

> *Why else do they seem to turn to us today?*
> *For now they know we do not know we relish*

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[5] *Selected Poems 1956-1986*. By ANNE STEVENSON. Oxford University Press, £10.95.

[6] *Presences: New and Selected Poems*. By P. J. KAVANAGH. Chatto & Windus, £4.95.

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The end of love, evaporation of children,
While we enjoy them, love our own death even;

That melancholy is our atmosphere. Like autumns
We watch our own departing. . . . We must like it.

Someone once commented that autumn is the curse of English poetry, but Kavanagh avoids it more often than not. Melancholy is certainly his atmosphere but, as with his admired Edward Thomas for whom "there must be doubt in heaven to accommodate him", Kavanagh takes to it with vigour, writing at his best with a plain, declarative lyricism which is often very moving indeed.

In "Satire 1" he writes to his friend Patrick Creagh that "a poet's a burdensome, touchy thing to be", and there are times when he collapses under the burden into prolixity and a rather rambling sententiousness. But there are poems in *Presences* which go straight to the heart, and in that telling phrase of his are beyond decoration. Outstanding among these is "Sometimes", threading its way through a delicate syntax, full of quiet deliberating pauses and coming out exactly right:

There was one who was perfect, who had
faults doubtless, but they were for God
to see, not for us who loved her, though whatever
I think of her is usually mixed with my
own falling short. But sometimes I see her
as she was, nothing to do with me:

as sometimes a cloud leaves the sun alone
and every leaf on a tree is a plate for light,
the tree become solely itself, and stays itself
though another cloud crosses and it goes dull again,
its secret kept; puzzled at by the eyes
of one who wants it always to stay gilded,
isolated, amazing, resentful of its patience,
obscuringly angered by what he sometimes sees.

VERNON SCANNELL is another poet whose autumnal meditations avoid the curse, but then he's always been a contender. Risking the accusation that some of his more fanciful sentiments may sound "like anthropomorphic gush" (as they occasionally do), he rounds disarmingly on his readers with a firm "and yet" which closes in on the next line, hooking them immediately and carrying on without pause for further doubt.

His new collection, *Funeral Games*,[7] though often dark in tone, is a hugely enjoyable volume, the pleasure lying not so much in any startling originality as in its candid appeal to common experience. Of "Hands" he writes:

I like to watch them rest on tables, knees,
Lifting a pint of beer or with deft ease
Rolling a fag which later burns between
Dark oaken knuckles which have never been
Surely as soft and sensitive to pain
As this pen-pusher's hand I look at now;
But most of all I like to witness how
They lift small, tired grandchildren and hold
Them curled and safe, how gently they enfold
Their always welcome, always cherished guests,
Become protecting, gnarled and living nests.

To anyone who claims that this kind of strict, though never constricting, metrical conversation looks easy the answer must be: "You try it."

Scannell is the kind of poet who hits the nail on the head, and is never afraid of using phrases like "hits the nail on the head" though he'd never dream of placing inverted commas round them. Time and again he achieves remarkably exact passages of description. The words themselves may be commonplace but their combinations are often quietly startling—as in those "dark oaken knuckles" or a camera which is "black-cowled" as it gives its blessing to an image while at the same time freezing it to death.

A deservedly popular poet, Vernon Scannell exemplifies Robert Frost's dictum that a poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom. In its modest way, too, his work is committed to that idea of usefulness which concerned Brecht. He will go on being read and remembered.

BY CHANCE, the title poem of Vernon Scannell's *Funeral Games*, where a widow looks around her husband's favourite room after his death, contains an inventory which provides a convenient link with Roy Fuller's new collection, *Consolations*.[8]

The recorded Brandenburgs, the piano-lid
Still raised and on the music-rest the Liszt
Consolation Number Three, the pages cold,
And, underneath the window, on his desk
Pencils and speechless sheets of lined A4
With one apart on which a few words walk. . . .

With very little shift of emphasis, this could be Fuller posthumously casting his ironic eye on his own work-place. Although there is no direct reference to them in the book itself, the opening bars of Liszt's Consolation Number One appear as the design on its cover so that we read the announcement: *Consolations*—Andante con Moto—Roy Fuller. This is Fuller's pace and character exactly. Published to coincide with his seventy-fifth birthday, there is a resourceful liveliness about these meditations on age, accident, apparently random events, and the intimations of an inscrutable design. Fuller has grown old with a debonair stoicism, developing a self-deprecating and quizzical persona in his poems which relishes the mock-dismissal or send-up of its own deliberations as "further triads of essential bosh" even as it raises important questions about human existence. His bosh is certainly of the essence.

As in the poem of that title, his "Garden Queries" are insistent speculations, and a bird's song (or a composer's attempt to transcribe it) is exemplary. The digitally precise

[7] *Funeral Games*. By VERNON SCANNELL. Robson Books, £6.95.
[8] *Consolations*. By ROY FULLER. Secker & Warburg, £5.95.

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timing with which the poem is set in motion is not, as Fuller would playfully suggest, old age's fussy preoccupation with minutiae. It is part of his imaginative precision in charting the natural processes of recurrence by which, as he approaches the time when he will no longer be able to "command an action replay of the Spring/And see the detail inattention missed", he has become increasingly absorbed:

9.25: the throstle's resourceful song
Goes on. To whom or what, is the question raised.

Later, the garden's silent in the night,
A crescent moon aloft. And equally

One speculates as to inherent wrong
In the cosmos. When that initial atom blazed

How could the mystery of reflected light
Have been foreseen, after dusk's melody?

If, as he claims, "lingering unease in moments of unhappiness" is a feature of old age, Fuller's consolation must surely lie in the fine gift he possesses to succeed in what "James said of the notebook habit: 'To catch/And keep something of life . . .'", and his modest claim to "try my best with poetry to match/Everyday's marvellous and varied prose" should not lead to an undervaluing of several ambitious forays outside the everyday. One of the most successful of these is the reminiscent monologue of a Shakespearean actor, "The Marcellus Version", although even here we are referred with humour and a crusty resilience to the perennial question:

"To be or not to be?" Eh? There's the point.
"To die, to sleep, is that *all?" There it goes.*
You get the answer simply by surviving.
There's nothing after death, not even dreams.
But life's worth living. Yes, despite the fact
That wives die far too early or too late;
And rotten luck; and botched ambition.

Alan Brownjohn is adept at producing witty fables of middle-aged anxiety. Twenty years Roy Fuller's junior, he shares that gift for treating personal subject matter with a wry, deceptive detachment, and can distil a considerable lyricism from a mix of memory, desire and social observation. He is at his least convincing when he joins the tribe of incipient buffers, itemising the symptoms with a familiar, rather predictable panache:

I limp, and ask myself
How much longer has this machine? It prolongs
Its life with meticulous arrangements, hating to leave
A chair not parallel with a table, or find
The Co-op coffee granules on the wrong shelf;
But it grows slower with its diligence.

What gives Brownjohn's work its real strength and character is the manner in which he projects his unease on to the world around him while remaining scrupulously aware of doing so. "Walking the streets I see too easily/A confluence of the worst in us, beyond/Arranging into calm or tenderness." Realising that he sees it "too easily", that he has a weakness for the soft-focus of melancholy effects, he compensates by giving his anxieties the weight of firm detail. Several of the poems in *The Old Flea-Pit*[9] are cinematic dream-fantasies in which he finds himself on a slip-road of his imagination. Even an apparently straightforward January walk assumes the rather chilling properties of a location (or dislocation) shot.

In the salt-marshes, under a near black
Sky of storm or twilight, the whole day
Dark on the creeks where the wind drives wavelets back
Against the filling tide, I have lost my way

On a path leading nowhere, my only guide
The light half-way up a television mast
Five miles across the waste; and if I tried,
I could imagine hearing, under this vast

Raw silence of reeds and waters, the deep drone
Of generators, gathering up the power
To send its message out; and, stopped alone
By this channel's edge, revisit a lost hour

At a restaurant table, in a vanished place
(An organ chiming in the hushed cave below)
When three sat smiling in an alcove space
And saw their futures, thirty years ago. . . .

It is as if Brownjohn has been given an unscripted walk-on part in a movie by a director who seems to be setting him some kind of initiative test to see whether he will be able to find a route towards the meaning of his own life—which is, of course, what so many of Brownjohn's scenarios are about. The director is his *alter ego*, his secret sharer, and Brownjohn the bit-part actor is perpetually auditioning in the hope of landing the main role and achieving an overview of the whole script.

For him the "Cure" (one of his titles) would be to become

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[9] *The Old Flea-Pit*. By Alan Brownjohn. Hutchinson, £5.95.

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"free of his own mists", and in another dream-fantasy he considers how, having one day gone off leaving "the rest of you behind with your confusion", he might

> *one unexpected day, sail back*
> *With another persona, yes, like someone*
> *Else altogether, and nothing like myself,*
> *As an unknown* deus ex machina, *making*
> *Everyone stop and listen and behave*
> *Striking clarity into your souls at last, at last!*
> *—And then pull off my mask and sing it out:*
> It was me! It was me! This is what I had to do!

It is that snap into clear focus, that sudden clarity, which the drift of his poetry hankers after, but Brownjohn's talent remains one for exploring the doubts rather than finding the answers.

WITH JOHN LOVEDAY'S attractively produced *Particular Sunlights*[10] there's a return to a firm sense of location which is confident but seldom taken for granted. Loveday's is an affectionate, gently reverential poetry full of ancestral voices, and the poems themselves are carefully crafted objects—many of them small, neatly turned, and with the scent of the woodshed still on them.

Not all of them succeed in going beyond the mere accuracy of their particulars, but the best of them are little miniatures of revelation. "Noah's Flood", for example, could be the vision of Stanley Spencer's Cookham transferred to the Norfolk of Loveday's childhood:

> *"It rained for forty days and nights" . . . and so*
> *Out there beyond the high window*
> *It did, in our imaginations, grey-*
> *Brown water rising till the village lay*
> *Submerged in Noah's Flood. The ark was made*
> *In our own yard; long planks of poplar laid*
> *End-on made do for gopher wood; the beasts*
> *Stayed safely vague and credible; south-east,*
> *Near Diss, lay Ararat; on Ashton's roof*
> *Of red, washed tiles, I saw the dove.*

AND A WELCOME to *Poetry World No. 1*[11]*—Modern Poetry in Translation* by another name and under a new imprint. This first issue contains the entire text of Vasko Popa's volume *The Cut* and, among several other contributions, this appropriately named poem, "Encounter", by the West German poet Elisabeth Borchers. It returns us to William Carlos Williams and the imperative of usefulness:

> *Sometimes it keeps getting colder*
> *and it's high time to learn what counts.*
> *As with W. C. Williams,*
> *doctor to the poor in New Jersey*
> *for his entire life.*
>
> *When I ran into him the last time*
> *he said: An end to dreams.*
> *I wrote it down. A phrase that appears*
> *useful to me.*

[10] *Particular Sunlights*. By JOHN LOVEDAY. Headland (38 York Avenue, West Kirby, Wirral, Merseyside L48 3JF), £4.25.

[11] *Poetry World No. 1*. Edited by DANIEL WEISSBORT. Anvil Press, £5.95.

Guards

I remember the windows in the evening;
five grey guards above the bed, their thin
pale uniforms were not assuring,
what monsters might they not let in?
Might they not all float in unobserved
and let loose the damnation we deserved?

Wry-faced clouds and empty dinner-plates,
cloths hung on the pipes under the sink,
webs in the attic, shattered slates,
the faded ink
on newspapers whose eyes dissolved in dots
and yellow patches,
a scumble of coal-dust and dead matches,
the earth round flowerpots.

I screw my eyes up in the dark and see
your open brown eyes staring back at me
with all the artlessness
and heartlessness
of childhood, until the tears come.
The guards as usual are waiting, playing dumb.

George Szirtes

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Books Encountered

The Aristocracy in England 1660-1914. By J. V. Beckett. Blackwell, £22.50.

"An estate is a pond", said Defoe, "but trade is a spring." Not altogether. The author, Lecturer in History at the University of Nottingham, learnedly and elegantly shows how land, improved by innovation, remained the basis of aristocracy well into the industrial era, imposing a wistful ethos on the rising middle classes. This looks like becoming a standard work.

Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe. By David Herbert Donald. Bloomsbury, £16.95.

Vita brevis, ars longwinded: a Wolfe-sized biography which earns its shelf-inches with a compassionate, sceptical view of its subject—a giant blend of genius and windbag, his best work largely autobiographical, his energy and appetite huge and immoderate, cut off at 38. Professor Donald is especially good on Maxwell Perkins, Wolfe's Scribner's editor.

How Institutions Think. By Mary Douglas. Routledge & Kegan Paul, £20.00.

Densely argued text of Dr Douglas's 1985 Abrams Lectures at Syracuse University, training an anthropologist's eye on group dynamics, starting head-on with Durkheim and his critics, late and early, and continuing with analysis of institutional identity, survival, forgetfulness, and decision-making. Veteran bureaucrats could add colourful examples, but will recognise the tunes.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: Women Photographers for the US Government 1935 to 1944. By Andrea Fisher. Pandora, £9.95.

Annotated documentary art, amply illustrated in black-and-white, from New Deal agencies. Dorothea Lange's landscapes, farmers, immigrants, etc., are the best known and most monumental; Marion Post Wolcott's are bleak and painterly: but other work, notably by Esther Bubley, Ann Rosener, and Marjory Collins, has more messy humanity and "life"—proto-TV rather than socially conscious cinema stills.

Dostoievsky: The Stir of Liberation 1860-1865. By Joseph Frank. Robson Books, £17.95.

Third volume (in a planned five) of Professor Frank's magnificent biography, covering the return to St Petersburg after ten years in Siberia, and the genesis of *The Insulted and Injured, Notes from the House of the Dead, Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, and *Notes from Underground*. As in earlier volumes, mundane irrelevancies are banished to the wings, while thoughts and feelings dominate the stage.

The Theatre of Tom Stoppard. By Anthony Jenkins. Cambridge University Press, £17.50, $29.95.

The author, from the University of Victoria, British Columbia, is an actor and director, and brings stage insight to a straightforward chronological study. Main contention: that the later "political" plays are no departure from the earlier, whimsical-philosophical work. A welcome emphasis: on Stoppard's labyrinthine radio drama, where his fantasy always "plays fair".

Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism. By Millicent Marcus. Princeton University Press, $48.00, £32.10; paper $17.50, £11.70.

Beginning with four neo-realist films (*Roma, città aperta; Ladri di biciclette; Riso amaro; Umberto D*), Professor Marcus considers cognate work from Comencini, Fellini, Visconti (but *Senso*, not *Ossessione* or *La Terra trema*), Antonioni, Olmi, Germi, Pasolini, Petri, Bertolucci, Lina Wertmuller, Rosi, the Taviani brothers, and Scola. As that list suggests, the book is stronger on scholarship than on critical evaluation; and all the film titles are in Amer-English.

The Distant Isle: The Orkney Background of Edwin Muir. By George Marshall. Scottish Academic Press, £12.50.

Somewhat devout study, by a fellow-Orcadian, of the primitive and close-knit world which informed Muir's writing, with its emphasis on the Golden Age, the Fall, and the longing to return from exile. Some of the detail seems parochial: but then it would, wouldn't it?

The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture. By Marjorie Perloff. University of Chicago Press, $24.95, £19.95.

Not a study of Futurism, but a survey of how Modernism began, and so tending to conflate all avant-garde movements. "We are the first men of a Future that has not materialised", wrote Wyndham Lewis in 1937. Professor Perloff might have quoted that; but her book is discriminating, erudite, lavishly illustrated, and handsomely produced.

R. S. Thomas: Poet of the Hidden God. By D. Z. Phillips. Macmillan, £25.00.

Professor Phillips teaches philosophy at Swansea, and has previously written on, *inter alia*, prayer and belief. His approach to R. S. Thomas is moral and theological rather than prosodic—which leaves the reader to do most of the critical work. But the quotations are generous, and the seriousness is exemplary.

Richard Hughes: Novelist. By Richard Poole. Poetry Wales Press, £12.95.

Searching and long-needed study, by an accomplished poet, teacher, and critic, who has previously edited two volumes of Hughes's shorter works. A brief biography precedes a longer critical survey, quoting others' reactions, and indicating but never fully assessing the debt to Conrad and the comparison with William Golding.

The Poet Auden: A Personal Memoir. By A. L. Rowse. Methuen, £9.95.

Incredibly vainglorious account of the author's few contacts with the poet plus lordly reactions to the poems. It would be funny if it weren't so sad.

The Ego is Always at the Wheel. By Delmore Schwartz. P. N. Review/Carcanet, £6.95.

These brief essays or "bagatelles", edited by Robert Phillips, include nine previously unpublished, six from an earlier volume, and four from periodicals, etc. Light, prankish, but never far from Schwartz's poetic concerns, they virtually qualify him for the Algonquin round table and the company of Thurber, Perelman, or Wolcott Gibbs. Limericks by Shakespeare; one-liners from Wordsworth; Keats swinging a malacca cane.

The Poetry of Tennyson. By Alastair W. Thomson. Routledge & Kegan Paul, £24.00.

Worthwhile but over-priced examination and analysis by the author of the distinguished *Wordsworth's Mind and Art* (1969). Professor Thomson inclines to Eliot's final verdict; "a great poet, and one who might have been a consummate master of minor forms, but who took to turning out large patterns on a machine." Still, he also pays tribute to Tennyson's variety and possible affinities with Symbolism.

Franz Kafka: Pictures of a Life. By Klaus Wagenbach. Translated by Arthur S. Wensinger. Pantheon/Carcanet, £9.95.

Sumptuous annotated photo-album with some 500 items from the Kafka archive. An easy introduction to Kafka's personality, but an alienating glimpse of antiquated irrelevancies—walrus moustaches, early motor-cars, Chaplinesque streetscapes. The real insight and terror are timeless. A volume to treasure, all the same.

R.M.

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CHRONICLE

A South African Culture

In a Lost Language

By Dan Jacobson

THE LITTLE *dorp* of Kenhardt lies in the north-western corner of the Cape Province, one of the least populated regions of the Republic: on the edge of the Kalahari desert, as people are inclined to say (in rather random fashion) about such places. In 1914 my father, H. M. Jacobson, rode on horseback through Kenhardt as a member of a commando of "loyalist" Boers from the Eastern Transvaal. They were in pursuit of another commando headed by General Maritz, who had gone into rebellion against the Pretoria government on the outbreak of the First World War. In his partial autobiography, *My Early Days*, sections of which have been published in magazines in South Africa and England, my father tells the following anecdote:

> "When our commando rode into Kenhardt I noticed a building that looked uncommonly like a small synagogue. I broke ranks and approached it a little closer. I was not mistaken. I have a vivid recollection of the incident for two reasons. Firstly I was reprimanded by the commandant for breaking ranks when riding through the town. And secondly, when I looked at the foundation stone, I noticed an error in the Hebrew spelling in the engraving. The word 'Even' (stone) was spelt with the letter *ayin* instead of with an *aleph*. I pointed this out to the head of the congregation when I later had lunch with him—something I would *not* do now."

What is most remarkable about this story, I would suggest, is not that my father, who had migrated from Eastern Europe to South Africa in 1903, and who had been farming in the Lichtenberg district when the War broke out, should have been a member of a Boer commando. Nor is it the fact that barely ten years after the end of the Anglo-Boer War, Afrikaners should have been in armed conflict with their fellow-Afrikaners. It is rather that *Kenhardt*, of all places, should at that date have had a sufficiently large Jewish community to warrant the establishment and maintenance of a synagogue—even if it was one whose founders were unsure of how to spell a common Hebrew word. I have no idea whether that building is still standing; but I am certain that the community which built it has long since vanished.

The Jews of Eastern Europe began to migrate in relatively large numbers to South Africa only after the discovery of gold on the Reef at the beginning of the 1880s. Inevitably, most of them made their way to the gold or diamond fields; many remained in the well-established ports like Cape Town and Durban which served the rapidly growing cities of the interior. In addition to these, however, a significant number spread out in all directions along the rapidly expanding railway lines, and beyond them, across the length and breadth of the country—a pattern of movement strikingly unlike that of their cousins who had gone to the United States, say, or to England. These newcomers set themselves up in business as itinerant merchants (*smouses*) or village shopkeepers, or first as the one, then as the other; others became cattle speculators, farmers, hoteliers. As recently as the 1940s, when I travelled as a boy with my family on holiday journeys across the country, it sometimes seemed to me that there was no place so small and remote as to be without its Jewish family or families. One saw their names on sun-blistered shop-awnings or on bright brass plates affixed to tiny offices; the heads of such families, when one met them, generally turned out to be small, rather hardbitten, unillusioned men, speaking a strange Yiddish-like Afrikaans or Afrikaans-like Yiddish; their children, by contrast, were English-speaking, defensive about their *backveld* origins and eager to urbanise themselves.

Well, they succeeded. If the first phase of the community's growth, roughly speaking, was one of immigration and dispersion, the second was that of consolidation and concentration. The Jews of the *platteland* began to move to the cities largely in search of material self-betterment: for the same reason, ultimately, that the Afrikaners were to do so, in incomparably greater numbers, and the Blacks in even greater numbers still, in subsequent decades. Indeed, by the 1960s smaller cities like Kimberley and Bloemfontein, which had themselves been magnets to the Jews of their hinterland, had begun to lose their communities to the larger centres. There were, of course, peculiarly "ethnic" reasons, too, for this movement: not just the celebrated eagerness of the members of the second generation to enter their favoured professions (medicine, the law) for which wider opportunities were to be found in the cities, but also the feeling that Jewish religious, social, and cultural institutions could be more easily preserved there. The internal migration was also hastened by the adoption of avowedly anti-Semitic policies by the Afrikaner Nationalist Party during the 1930s and '40s: a development which did much to envenom relations between the Jews in the countryside and their neighbours.

The third phase of the community's history—the present one—has followed ineluctably from the others. It can best be described as one of attrition from within; this as a consequence of intermarriage, emigration (in the face of political dangers and uncertainties ahead), and a rapidly declining birth rate. Nevertheless, even today the Jews of South Africa continue to play a role out of proportion to their numbers in the country's financial, industrial, and professional life.

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This would hardly be disputed both by those who are well-disposed to them and by those who are not. As one might expect, South African Jews have also been prominent beyond their numbers in fostering the country's artistic and intellectual traditions.

As far as literature is concerned, the Jewish contribution has been made almost entirely in the English language and through the institutions of the English-speaking section of the population. (Though there are a few names which occupy a prominent place in the history of Afrikaans literature; and the efforts of some Jewish writers and producers have been important to the emergence of Black theatre groups in recent years.) Recently, the labours of Joseph Sherman of Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg, have revealed that a distinctively South African genre of stories in the Yiddish language also began to emerge at a very early stage of the period of mass migration from Eastern Europe. Now that some of those stories have been made accessible to readers of English (in an anthology edited by Joseph Sherman, entitled *From a Land Far Off*, to be published by the Kaplan Institute, University of Cape Town), they too can for the first time become part of a common South African patrimony.

In his introduction to the anthology, its editor summarises the history of Yiddish as a spoken and written language from the time of its origins (chiefly out of Middle High German) onwards. He also describes the attempts that certain writers and publicists made in Europe during the 19th century to redeem it from its status as a despised "jargon", a kind of depraved, Hebraised dialect of German, and to have it recognised as a language as worthy of respect as any other, in which high literary and intellectual ambitions could be realised.[1] Anyone who tells the story of Yiddish has then to go on to speak of its end as a living language, which was brought about by a single historical event: the destruction of the Jewry of Eastern Europe at the hands of the Nazis.

Many of the Yiddish writers in South Africa did their work before the onset of the great crisis which overwhelmed their kinsmen in Europe; some of them wrote during it; some were left to memorialise what had been lost, in the aftermath. This anthology, however, is confined to stories they wrote about the new land, "Africa", as they simply called it, and which they published in a variety of hopelessly short-lived journals which they themselves battled to bring into existence. As writers of the first phase of the community's history (even when they did their work in later years, retrospectively), their prime topic was bound to be the vicissitudes of immigrant life. They describe the country, with its bareness, its space, its relative emptiness, its abrupt, desultory cities; more intensely still, they try to describe the encounters between the immigrants and the cultures and peoples with which they were confronted.

The stories show such encounters often to have been abrasive, charged with hostility and suspicion on both sides. This should not come as a surprise. What is more surprising, perhaps, is that the writers so often speak of their immigrant Jewish characters somehow recognising themselves in the apparently alien folk among whom their lot had been cast. Initially, at least, there is a tendency to see the Afrikaners as a god-fearing, hospitable, quasi-Israelite people, themselves wandering in search of their promised land. This not wholly romanticised view of an earlier phase of Afrikaner society is strongly reminiscent of that adopted by certain English-language writers—like Pauline Smith, for example, in the stories she gathered in *Little Karoo* (1925).

With the Blacks there is a mirroring of a different kind. Though they, of all groups, are most "native" to the country, they are described by some of the writers as fellow-migrants, too; people who are summoned from afar to serve the commerce, industry, and domestic establishments of white society, and yet are thrust contemptuously into its margins. Bewildered, dislocated, outcast and yet indispensable, unable to comprehend the languages in which they are addressed, they are sometimes to be pitied, sometimes to be feared, always to be regarded with a kind of uneasy wonder, in which recognition or even identification struggles with a profound unfamiliarity. The English-speaking South Africans, interestingly enough, hardly appear in these tales. Perhaps their social and cultural dominance at the time simply made them too daunting or too remote a group for these authors to tackle.

On the whole the Jewish immigrants to South Africa were as poverty-stricken when they arrived as their cousins who crowded into New York's Lower East Side and the East End of London. They had to take jobs which no one else wanted, and the political and economic insecurities of the country were often more starkly apparent to them than the opportunities of which they had heard in the old country. Nowhere in the two dozen stories reprinted in *From a Land Far Off* is the lot of the newcomer sentimentalised. On the contrary, a reader may well come to feel by the end of the volume that he has learned rather more than he wishes to know about the nomadic life of the pedlar, say, or the noisy, sweaty, smelly job of the *kaffireatnik*, the assistant in the eating-houses for Black mine-workers. (*Kaffireaters*, these institutions were elegantly termed; hence *kaffireatnik*.)

However, there is another reason why the theme of failure looms as large in the anthology as it does. As far as the writers are concerned, the story *is* one of failure. The immigrants, or many of them, may eventually have prospered, but in so doing they and their children are described as having lost their most valuable and distinctive possession: their Jewishness (at least as the writers would wish the term to be understood). That loss—which encompasses the strict observance of their religion, as well as the languages they had brought with them (Yiddish, and the sacred tongue, Hebrew)—could not be compensated for, the stories insist in their different

[1] No South African can escape drawing the parallel here with Afrikaans, which also had to fight vigorous battles for acceptance as a serious language, so to speak, and as an indispensable element of the national consciousness of the people who spoke it.

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ways, by any material advantage that may have accrued in the process.

Within this general plaintive or accusatory account of things, one can sometimes pick up the sound of a complaint which is never actually expressed; that issuing from the story-teller who feels his audience, small though it is, to be turning away from him and his medium even as he speaks to it.

One also notices that while the stories lament the decline of the traditional pieties, their authors show themselves to have a receptive eye for villainy and disreputable behaviour; their relish for these is rather like that which some Yiddish writers in Eastern Europe had for the kinds of Jewish gangsterism best known to them. (One thinks also of Isaac Babel, with his tales of Benya Krik and the Jewish hoodlums of Odessa.) The life depicted in the anthology is not at all genteel: fighting, drinking, irregular unions with Black and Afrikaner women, and plain cheating and sharp business practice are all represented in it; not to speak of what one writer refers to as "some judicious arson". One cannot help suspecting, indeed, that precisely because they were confident their stories would be read only by readers and speakers of Yiddish like themselves, the authors permitted themselves to speak more frankly about such aspects of immigrant life than they might otherwise have done.

ARE THE STORIES, THEN, to be valued primarily as documents, rather than as literary works? The answer is that this distinction is itself a misleading one. The stories would only doubtfully have merit as documents if they did not move and entertain the reader as imaginative writing is supposed to. Some are amateurish, certainly; hardly more than little homilies or appeals for sympathy. But at their best they do have a genuine literary power: by which I mean that the world perceived or presented in them is not ultimately separable from the characters who perceive it. In such stories the perception *is* or becomes the character, and vice versa.

Take, for instance, the portrait of the nameless horse belonging to Mendele, a hawker of fruit and vegetables, and his wife Chaya-Yente, from the story, "Who Comes First" by Hyman Polsky.

> "True, it had a cataract over the left eye, dripped urine continually, and was always surrounded by hordes of green flies; it had collapsed sides, protruding bones and well-worn knees . . . nevertheless it was a good horse: quietly and sedately it did the work, contented with its lot. It did not complain when it had to stand a few hours longer in the shafts, or had sometimes to fast a little. Apparently the clever horse knew that its master was not himself given strongly to eating. . . .
>
> When Mendel arrived home in the evenings and the horse, covered in sweat, stood as if dead from exhaustion, Chaya-Yente felt enormous compassion for it. If it had been at all possible she would, it seems, have taken it into the house and given it a little glass of tea, in the same way as—to make a distinction between sacred and profane things mentioned successively—her husband. But because she could not, she would fiddle about him, pat him, stroke him, look him in the eye and speak friendly words. The horse, it turned out, well understood, because at such times it would lift up its head as if to say, 'What use are all these things? Rather give me something to eat.'"

Or this account, from "Ben" by J. M. Sherman, of a lonely storekeeper's Sunday morning in the countryside: a passage which, like many others in the anthology, reveals the depth of the writer's debt to his Russian examplars. In this case it is Gogol, perhaps, who is most likely to come to mind.

> "On Sundays he smartened himself up. On Sunday he generally gave a good deal of time to himself. . . . He would lie in bed and read the *Sunday Times*. Later, walking around in his pyjamas in summer with a flyswatter in his hand, he used to chase the flies from his room for half-an-hour, and in winter, sitting in the small kitchen which was built on to his bedroom, he used to throw coals into the small iron stove, and each time say to himself, 'Cold!' Still later he took a bath, shaved, cut off his corn, trimmed the hair from his ears and nose. . . .
>
> When he had done all this he locked himself in his bedroom and prayed. From a drawer he pulled out a faded pair of phylacteries, with peeling, nearly white straps, and contemplated them with the expression of one who was seeing them for the first time. . . . What he said there nobody knew: he had no prayer book. After ten or fifteen minutes he would turn sharply to face the bed, spit three times, as he might have done anywhere, snatch off the phylacteries, pack them back in the yellow, Springbok tobacco bag from which he had taken them, and hide them in the drawer—until the next Sunday."

"Documentary" in quite another and unambiguous sense are the biographies of individual writers with which the editor has prefaced each group of stories. These make up a sub-genre of their own, with their tales of overweening ambitions poured into Lilliputian furores; of fiercely nurtured and now wholly forgotten political and personal differences (Zionist versus Leftist, Hebraist versus Yiddishist, patron versus client); of unavailing struggles to keep journals alive in the face of tiny circulations and preposterous finances. How admirable, how poignant, and how risible, somehow, is the picture of a shopkeeper—stuck in a place like De Aar, that most forlorn of railway junctions, in the middle of the endless, sun-blighted Karroo—who is painstakingly putting together a volume of verse in Yiddish, for eventual publication back in Poland. Or the picture of a moneyless handful of people launching a Yiddish journal in Bloemfontein—once the tinpot capital of the Boer Republic of the Orange Free State, now merely a provincial capital—under the resounding title, *Freistater Beginen. The Free State Dawn*: nothing less.

A somewhat similar source of pathos and amusement can be found in the glossary at the back of the book, which is much more than the dry compilation it might ordinarily be assumed to be. So improbable a collocation of words and phrases from Yiddish, Hebrew, Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, and broken English in itself encapsulates the nature of the extraordinary enterprise in which these Yiddish writers were engaged; it reveals the yawning racial and cultural disjunc-

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tions their work confronted, embodied, and attempted to bridge. Where else could one possibly find in such proximity words and phrases like *gefilte fish* (Yiddish: stuffed fish) and *bhansela* (Zulu: small present); *Kiddush* (Hebrew: blessing) and *Nagmaal* (Afrikaans: Holy Communion in the Dutch Reformed Church); *xoxo* (Xhosa: insect, evil spirit) and *Yahrzeit* (Yiddish: prayers for the dead, recited on anniversaries); *fiktses* (English: fixtures), *shofar* (Hebrew: ram's horn trumpet), *bokjol* (Afrikaans: rough country dance), and all the rest?

WHICH BRINGS ME directly to my last point, one which is not comic in any sense. I referred earlier to "a common patrimony" which might be thought to be available to the peoples of South Africa. Given the country's past, present, and likely future, this phrase must have been taken by many readers to be no more than a sentimental or pious flourish. That is not how I would wish it to be read. What I had in mind was something specific and yet difficult to define. If one can discern anything resembling a common cultural patrimony in South Africa, it is to be found, painfully enough, in the dislocations and disruptions which each group inflicts on the others and is provoked by them to feel within itself. The liveliest and most distinctive elements in the cultural self-consciousness of the country are by their very nature interstitial and reactive. They grow at the point where mutually hostile and mutually dependent racial and linguistic groups meet; though they are indeed painful, they are often very funny too. In describing a developing self-consciousness of this kind it is impossible to tell abrasion from stimulus, threat from nurture. But each group, willy-nilly, recognises its own perplexities and predicaments in the terms that the others have managed to articulate, and recoils from them—and in so doing creates them anew.

According to official doctrine, of course, a "true" culture emerges only out of a jealously preserved separateness between peoples, each of which knows itself *as* a people only so far as it manages to keep itself inviolate from mingling or even, ideally, from contact with others. But official doctrine, which has for decades been attempting to impose by force its own versions of political and cultural separateness on the variegated groups who make up the country, is false to the deepest experience even of those who invented it. Who can doubt that Afrikaner Nationalism, in all its manifestations, is itself a reactive movement? And who can doubt that the same is true of those burgeoning Black Consciousness movements which are today so loudly proclaiming their indifference or hostility to the white man and his works?

Many of the Yiddish writers whose stories appear in *From a Land Far Off* cherished their own variety of the myth of a lost, "pure" culture, forever private to themselves. There is no such thing: certainly not in South Africa; probably nowhere else either. It is appropriate that these stories lovingly translated from a lost language should serve to remind us of this truth.

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The Raising

This is where she settled to her rest,
Hushing the cries
Of the unready hearts
Who sank into history
Beyond repair,
All the drowned longings of all the drowned men.

Like a woman roused from sleep she props herself
Upon her hands,
Losing from their grip
A lover's irrecoverable dream
Of sailing forth and coming home again.

The rocking light descends and glimpses come
Through slow obscurity
Of shapes too delicate
To lift, the impress merely.
But up they bring her
Through the wavering halls, her newest courtiers
With their silent masks and dancing gestures.

Then in the dangerous air
Like the breaking of a dream we see
In dazzling drops
The miniatures of love,
A hundred golden hats and bearded faces.

Patrick Hare

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INTERVIEW

Ideas & Anarchy in the Middle East

ELIE KEDOURIE in conversation with MICHAEL CHARLTON

IN ONE OF *your essays, you quote with approval what Edward Gibbon as a young man set down concerning facts and history, giving it as your belief that nothing wiser has ever been written.*

"Facts [*Gibbon said*] **are of three kinds: those which prove nothing beyond themselves; those which serve to illustrate a character or explain a motive; and those which dominate the system and move its springs."**

Now, to take the last, your persistent theme is our misreading of the recent history of the Middle East. What is it essentially that has been overlooked?

ELIE KEDOURIE: What has been neglected is, I think, the character of what might be called the modern ruling classes of the Middle East. These people, in one way or another, appeared after the First World War; and that they appeared and were given their opportunity after the First World War was very much an outcome of decisions taken by British officials in London and in the Middle East. And it seemed to me that the way in which decisions were taken—and this is clear from the evidence—it seemed to me that these officials and their political masters had no notion of the chaos, the anarchy, the unscrupulousness lurking behind this façade which was then pretty well accepted: the façade of constitutionalism, representative government, and so on.

—How far do you wish to be understood—and how far are you to be understood—as the enemy, in that case, of "the modern world"?

KEDOURIE: "Enemy" would be very foolish, for the modern world exists, and how can you be its enemy? But you can be its critic. Yes, I would accept that I am a critic of the modern world.

—Your critique of these British officials extends beyond them to the people who sustain them, to the attitudes of mind in Europe; so it's not just "the Foreign Office" or the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House. But is it an hallucination of men of all parties in England, who over many years during and since "the end of Empire" thought that reform was necessary in the Middle East, that state and society there should be recast in some kind of European mould?

KEDOURIE: Reform?—why not? It is obvious that people might come to the conclusion, seeing what the Middle East was like, that "reform" was necessary. The question is: what kind of reform and, much more important, who is to be in charge of the reform? Reform, if it was to be successful, had to take account of traditions of rule and attitudes of subject-to-ruler, which had been there time out of mind. And if you wanted to ride roughshod over these, then you were very likely to come a cropper. That was not seen at all by very many in what I might call the intellectual and the official classes in England; in Europe perhaps, but Europe was not really very much concerned with that part of the world in the same way as England was. And here I am thinking of the long connection with the Ottoman Empire; the standing rule that the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire were a British interest; and then what came after

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MICHAEL CHARLTON, *one of Britain's leading broadcasters, is a veteran foreign correspondent for the BBC. His articles in* ENCOUNTER, *documenting the oral history of our times, include "How (& Why) Britain Lost the Leadership of Europe" (August, September, October 1981, issued in 1983 as a book by BBC Publications under the title "The Price of Victory"); "The Eagle and the Small Birds" (June, July-August, September-October 1983), a greatly expanded version of a BBC Radio 4 series covering the period from Yalta to "Solidarity" (BBC Publications, 1984); and "Star Wars" (February, March, April 1986). This present article is a revised version of a conversation originally broadcast by BBC Radio 3.*

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the War, when British officials did actually rule the area.

—You have a particular contempt, I think, that shows through what you write, for politics seen as "redemption"—this feeling of guilt and punishment that you detected in British official attitudes and in the political support for them.

KEDOURIE: Yes. This came very much to the fore after the First World War. It was very much the doing of T. E. Lawrence and what an unkind critic of Lawrence—Richard Aldington—called "the Lawrence bureau": the notion, that is, that a great injustice was done to the Sharif of Mecca and to the Arabs in general; that promises were given which had not been kept, and so on. There is little, if anything, in all this, and there was no call for such a feeling of guilt. There was another feeling of guilt which was much more generalised: the notion that it was wrong, somehow or another, for foreigners to rule over those who were not their kith-and-kin. That, again, is something which is rather absurd when you apply it to places like the Middle East or India which had from time immemorial been ruled by foreigners of one kind or another, and which had accepted it.

—When you set out to "destroy" Lawrence of Arabia, are you vulnerable to the charge that you felt you had to do that in order to sustain your own thesis? Why should we not see Lawrence (as we might, for example, see the SOE officers in Yugoslavia during the Second World War) as supporting the cause with which he was associated?

KEDOURIE: Well, he may well have done that. I first came upon Lawrence when I was at Oxford writing a book (published in 1956) called *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire*. I read, with some attention, what he had written in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and in his other writings; and I came to the conclusion that Lawrence was simply not telling the truth. Furthermore, that Lawrence was really practising a kind of sleight-of-hand, in that he was assuming that politics or political action ought to provide some kind of salvation, and that since salvation did not supervene, it was somebody's fault: it was the British Government's fault, it was the chaps in London who were greedy for power, etc.

—So really it's your assault on this "salvationist" view in politics, this millenarian view, the idea that a secular millennium is at hand, which is at the heart of your critique?

KEDOURIE: That is one aspect of my critique, certainly; and it applies fully to a figure like Lawrence, and applies much more to a doctrine like Nationalism, which to be sure is not something which has been very prominent or influential in Britain, but was much more influential on the continent of Europe, in the Balkans, in the Middle East, and elsewhere.

—One might have suspected you of being rather more in sympathy with Lawrence in this respect—that he was no trendy nationalist, that he was not for handing power over to the local gunmen. He was not supporting "sons against the fathers", as so many were at the time. He was acting in support of traditional political structures.

KEDOURIE: No, he wasn't. I don't think that you could say that he was acting in support of this or that. He was, in terms of beliefs or commitments, empty—and this emptiness is frightening. What you have here is a tremendous force whirling in a void. What he really was interested in was his own sensations. And that comes out very clearly in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which is really only about his own romanticised self.

YOUR HISTORICAL WRITING has issued a particular challenge to many modern presumptions about Nations and Nationalism. Why is it that you hold Arab nationalism to be a doctrine imported from Europe? More than that, invented by the Foreign Office.

KEDOURIE: Invented, certainly, because all these doctrines are invented doctrines. There is nothing natural, so to speak, in the doctrine—natural in the way in which, say, an ash tree is a natural feature of the landscape—for it is something which has to be contrived by argument and, of course, can be undone by argument. There is nothing natural about doctrines, and the fact is that it happened to be contrived in Europe. There is no getting away from this.

I don't think that I would say that it was "invented" by the Foreign Office. What I think is that, in relation to the Middle East, the Foreign Office were very much taken with the notion that there was this irresistible force in the area and that besides this force, there was nothing else which was worthy of notice. I think this comes out very clearly, most clearly, in the mid-1930s and afterwards when the Palestine Rebellion broke out—the rebellion against the British by the Arabs of Palestine.

—Against the Mandate?

KEDOURIE: Against the British Mandate. And one saw the people who were in charge of the relevant department in the Foreign Office, the Eastern Department, conducting a determined campaign in order to establish the point that if one really wanted to deal with these troubles in Palestine, it was not in Palestine that you dealt with them, but by having some kind of policy for "the Arab world" as a whole.

—Are you saying it was a parochial problem and should have been treated as such?

KEDOURIE: Yes, I think that all the evidence shows that it should have been treated as such; but it was *not* treated as such, and that was the point where "the Palestine problem" ran out of the control of the British Government. The rest followed.

—But, "contrived" or not, Nationalism is a doctrine which holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that

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nations can be known by characteristics which—I think you've written this yourself—can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is self-government. Why is that invalid, in your view, in the Middle East?

KEDOURIE: Because there are no such natural groups which, taken as such, have got to be formed into states. Because this is the claim of "nationalist doctrine": namely, that there are Nations, and because there are Nations they must *ipso facto* be made into states. Well now, here are all kinds of peoples, living jumbled up together with one another in this area; and how is one to distinguish between, say, an Armenian living in Beirut, and an Armenian living in Armenia? Can one say that the Armenian living in Beirut has got to go to Armenia because Armenia is where Armenians should be living? Again, Jews in the Arab world. Were they to be, so to speak, separated off because they were Jews? Were they Arabs because they had spoken Arabic for so very long? Were they Arabs, or not? How was one to discriminate? It was a quite impossible situation.

—But how is the line to be drawn? If Nationalism is of some validity in Europe, why not in the Middle East? Take Yugoslavia, for example. There are several very important antipathies which coexist, albeit uneasily, at present. Why is the notion of an autonomous Arab state as an ambition doomed to be an illusion in the Middle East?

KEDOURIE: Well, what is a state? A state is an organisation which depends on there being a government, on political institutions, on there being in the final analysis some kind of loyalty which supports both. When this doesn't exist—namely, when the essential loyalties do not go to the state, when people do not identify themselves with the state—then what is one to do? How is one able to sustain the weight of a political organisation which is supposed to embrace the whole of a very large number of people who do not—and cannot possibly—identify with it? This is true of "the pan-Arab state", which has not come into existence in spite of the tremendous torrents of doctrine which have flowed for decades now. It is also true of many states which do exist and the rulers of which have to maintain themselves, not through the loyalty of the citizens, but by sheer force and brutality.

An example? Take the state of Iraq, which was set up in the early 1920s and which was a jumble of peoples and religions. This jumble was suddenly proclaimed to be a state, and figures were imported from outside to rule over it in the name of a doctrine of which the people who were going to be ruled had no understanding at all. And when you look at the blood-stained history of the state of Iraq from its inception onwards it's a very vivid example of what I mean.

—Is your point, therefore, that this mosaic in the Middle East can only exist under some form of imperial order?

KEDOURIE: Some form of imperial order which is the kind of order most understood by the populations concerned.

—Is Israel an exception to what you've said about the "new states" called into being in the Middle East?

KEDOURIE: An exception in the sense that the population of the state, the Jewish population, is very different in its attitude to government, to rule, than the population which surrounds them. You can see this from the fact that the political institutions which exist there are genuinely parliamentary institutions that cannot function unless the citizens understand and are able to work them. In that sense, yes, it is different.

BUT IS THERE NOT A CONTRADICTION *in what you've said about the doctrine of Nationalism imported from Europe as responsible for so many of the contemporary ills there, in the fact of Israel's existence? Didn't it see its destiny in mundane terms; that is, the creation of a European type of state in the Middle East?*

KEDOURIE: When you mentioned Israel, I was thinking of Israel as it exists now. Israel as it exists now is a going concern, and is very different in its political institutions from its neighbours. That is very clear. How Israel came into being is very much the emanation of a political doctrine, Zionism, which is a kind, a variant, of Nationalism.

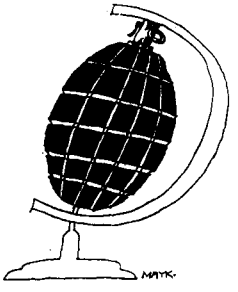
—A nationalist movement no different from others in the Middle East?

KEDOURIE: A nationalistic movement no different from others, the idea being that all the Jews should become citizens of a new Jewish state.

—What view, therefore, do you take of Zionism?

KEDOURIE: When you compare the dreams of Zionism with what actually came to pass, the difference is very striking. What happened is that, for one reason or another—not simply Zionism, but what went on in 20th-century Europe, what went on in the Middle East after World War I—there

Descartes Lives (as Terrorist)



New York City

EXPERTS *here said it was possible that recent hijacking was the work of "freelancers", Palestinians not particularly associated with any group but frustrated by the failure to regain land in Israel.*

"None of these terrorists are going to regain one inch of Palestinian land, but it is an expression of the anguish of the people", Professor Fouad Ajami (Johns Hopkins University) said. "**I hijack, therefore I am.** *This is a way the Palestinians are making a statement, just the way the Shiites are making a statement."*

NEW YORK TIMES

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was a new state. The argument of Zionism was that the Jews somehow or another, if they were to lead full lives as Jews, had all got to live in a Jewish state. This is certainly not feasible; it can't be done; Israel can't hold them. And if the Diaspora, which was really the kind of exile situation which Zionism abhorred, and the Jewish Diaspora today were to disappear, what would happen to Israel? It is the Diaspora which makes it possible to provide support for this beleaguered state.

—Therefore, if "homelessness" was the essential Jewish predicament, Israel has not proved the remedy?

KEDOURIE: Indeed not. And that is the great irony. What one can say is: well, here is a state which is a "going concern"; never mind how it came into being, or what the doctrine was which purported to justify its coming into being. Here it is; people live and try to arrange their common affairs as decently as possible; and that's all there is to it.

BACK TO THIS QUESTION OF *"overlordship" in the Middle East, and your belief that it is inevitable that there will or must always be an overlord in this area. Israel is the dominant military power in the area. Is it open to Israel to be this overlord?*

KEDOURIE: No. Israel is a small state which under current conditions is able to take care of itself militarily; but it would be absurd to think that Israel can exercise the role of overlord. The role of overlord has traditionally belonged to great powers or superpowers. The Ottoman Empire, which was an overlord for a very long time, was a great power in the Middle East. Then, again, when the Ottoman Empire became "the sick man of Europe", other great powers started jostling for position in the Middle East. And it looked for a time as though the one great power which would take the place of the Ottoman Empire in the area would be the British Empire. But that, of course, failed; and failed for many reasons which have to do, some of them, with the character of British policy in the Middle East. But it failed also because of the catastrophe of 1939 which really destroyed the Empire.

—As one listens to you, in this unsentimental approach you have, this realism and contempt for romantic views that emanated from Europe (of which you see Lawrence of Arabia as an embodiment), isn't there underlying this realism of yours also an element of romanticism and even nostalgia? It seems to me that your first choice would have been the Ottoman Empire, then the British or the French—anything other than what is actually happening.

KEDOURIE: Well, if one is going to find pleasure in what is actually happening, one would have to be very peculiar indeed. No, I don't think it's a matter of nostalgia. It is a matter of really trying to see how these tremendous supertankers, these great powers, operated; and how they man-

'In Nicaragua, thousands of international visitors have been taken on Potemkin tours and have returned home full of anti-American venom – partisans of a totalitarianism which they would be among the first to denounce were it to strike their own countries. Others have remained, to constitute a kind of international brigade of the 1980s.... Their story is just one more example of the ease with which revolutions can find supporters once they have occurred, and when a line of brutal simplicity has been laid down'

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aged to preserve a modicum of peace and civilisation; and how ultimately they came to a sticky end.

—But doesn't your critique leave a question unanswered? Supposing the British and the French had stayed on. How was power to be legitimised, given the presence of a large (if not a coherent) nationalist movement? Legitimised "at home", if not on-the-spot.

KEDOURIE: Well, in a sense, power after the passage of time becomes its own legitimisation.

Before the British left India,[1] I think that British power was considered by the British and by masses of Indians as a legitimate rule. After a certain period, the mere passage of time legitimates power.

—So you're not concerned with the origins of power, but merely the fact of having it.

KEDOURIE: The origins of power are not really of interest here; but the exercise of power and the passage of time, the duration of power, are.

—Is this perhaps why so many people think that you're a "Hobbesian", that the "Leviathan" might have been written by you . . . perhaps it has been reconstituted in our own time . . .

KEDOURIE: No, no, no.

— . . . that you grieve for the present calamities of land and country, as Hobbes did. Having been a Stuart royalist, and having to explain to himself the support of the Cromwellian Commonwealth, he writes the "Leviathan" as a vindication of orderly power, anything being better than anarchy.

KEDOURIE: Well, yes, for he was very much aware of the nature of civil war, was terrified of this kind of fratricidal political phenomenon, and who can blame him? What he tried to do was to argue out a position that unless people did agree (because it is a matter of agreement for him), unless people did agree to obey a ruler, then there will be a war of all against all. And there are today whole parts of the world where there appears to be a graphic illustration of his argument. The Middle East is one; Africa another; there may well be others.

—On this question of "overlordship". If, in the Middle East, it is not, or cannot be, Israel, and the European powers stand on the sidelines, and the Americans show a clear reluctance

[1] See Elie Kedourie, "Scuttling an Empire", *Commentary*, December 1985.

"After 22 Revolutions. . . ."

Baghdad

DESPITE *overwhelming superiority in firepower and equipment and almost complete mastery of the air, the Iraqi Army is being ground down by Iran because it lacks motivation and the will to fight, Western military analysts and diplomats say.*

"They are non-achievers", a Western military attaché said of the Iraqi Army. "Although they've theoretically got the weapons, the equipment, the flag-waving and tub-thumping, they just don't produce results. The evidence is in."

Analysts say the war, which began in September 1980, entered a crucial new stage on Feb. 9, when the Iranians broke through long-entrenched Iraqi defences near the city of Faw on the strategic Faw peninsula at the Gulf near Kuwait. Moving swiftly, the Iranians poured thousands of soldiers, most of them fiercely religious Shiite Moslem volunteer irregulars, into the gap. Three weeks later, after diverting huge amounts of artillery, tanks and troops, including the élite Republican Guard, in a counter-attack, the Iraqis have failed to oust them.

EXPERTS CONTRASTED **what one described as "five and a half years of military incompetence" and a "ponderously inflexible" Iraqi command structure with the ferocious fighting spirit of the lightly armed Iranians.**

The Iranians rush into battle welcoming "martyrdom" at the behest of their leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The Iranian front lines tend to be scenes of chaos and dedication, where turbaned mullahs with rifles slung on their backs rush about on brightly coloured motorcycles encouraging the troops.

RELIGIOUS SLOGANS *are posted everywhere, and reinforcements sometimes arrive cheerfully carrying their own coffins as a sign of their willingness to be "martyred." There is little sign of military activity behind the combat area itself.*

Calling the war a battle "between Islam and blasphemy", Ayatollah Khomeini has demanded the ouster of President Saddam Hussein of Iraq and his Ba'athist government, which holds a pan-Arab, secular ideology.

SOME MILITARY EXPERTS **in Baghdad traced the lack of enthusiasm among the Iraqi soldiers to two major political factors: what they viewed as a lack of a strong, clear sense of Iraqi national identity, and ambivalent feelings about the government and the Ba'ath Party.**

Like other Middle Eastern countries, with the exception of Egypt and Iran, Iraq is not a historic entity. The nation exists within lines that were drawn on a map by European powers, first in semi-colonial mandates after the Ottoman Empire fell in World War I, and then as independent countries after World War II.

Iraq has had 22 "revolutions", most of them government coups, since 1920.

"They haven't had enough time for people at the extremes of the nation to believe in a unity for which to sacrifice themselves", a diplomat in Baghdad said. "I doubt whether the veneer of nationalism is very thick or very substantial."

John Kifner
in THE NEW YORK TIMES

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to contemplate the task, what view do you take of the Soviet Union's chances? You once wrote of the "fortuitous and temporary" absence of Russia in the Middle East in the period after World War I.

KEDOURIE: Yes, I think that one has to take very seriously the chances of the USSR in the Middle East, simply because they are in a position to pursue a policy for decades on end and to persist. And this is not simply the Soviet Union, but this is Russia, expansionist Russia in Central Asia and the Caucasus. It took them decades, for instance, to subdue the Caucasus, but subdue it they did in the end. And if, for one reason or another, they found the way clear to exercising more power and influence than they do now, I should imagine that they would take the opportunity to do so. And why not? This is the character of these régimes.

—Do you think, then, that Marx and Lenin can accommodate Mohammed in a way that Christianity did not?

KEDOURIE: If by this you mean that they would have any sympathy, no. I don't think that Marxists have any sympathy with any of the revealed religions; in fact they consider them inimical, and whenever they can they put them down, persecute them, control them, as one can see within the USSR.

But if you mean that they can draw on the kind of attitudes that, for one reason or another, have become traditional in the Muslim world, namely deference to power and to authority, a passive acceptance by the subjects of a ruler, then I think, yes, that would be something which they could use.

—But unlike Japan, for example, which accepted it, would you agree that historically Islam has always resisted Western encroachment? How do you view the basis of that hostility?

KEDOURIE: I wouldn't say that it has always resisted. For a very long time (in the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th century) Muslim thinkers and political leaders believed that the salvation of the Muslim world lay in adopting European institutions and European civilisation. Things began to change in the second half of the 20th century, for two reasons. First, these attempts at transplanting political arrangements and cultural attitudes had, on the whole, manifestly failed. And in the second place, there was the example of something which seemed to be working and which was not Western; namely, the Soviet type of rule, which accordingly became attractive. I do not mean "Communism" or anything like that, but the notion that you could have a central power which can be ruthlessly centralising, which controls everything and plans everything, and comes up with answers to everything. That became very much the attraction if you look at the kind of rhetoric that Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, and many other leaders who arose in the 1950s and afterwards, used. The kind of rhetoric which believed in planning, in the power of government to establish a new kind of society, a better world, etc.

—You acknowledge that the Russians have possibilities in the Middle East. How do you assess their opportunities with a decline in the oil revenues in the years to come? There were ambitions stimulated in the Middle East by OPEC, and there's been an inevitable decline.

KEDOURIE: These ambitions were always very foolish. What is this revenue? It all comes from the export of a raw material; and, as we have seen over the last ten years, the prices of such exports go up and go down, and then go up and down again. There are no viable economic and political institutions that can make effective use, as people are discovering, of the opportunity offered by the windfall of these enormous revenues. So it was a very foolish expectation that money as such, mere cash, would transform the situation in the Middle East.

—There was the hope that these countries would become state-builders, that the state would be consolidated with these new revenues. Their apparent failure to do so, you would advance as evidence for your critique and the assessment of the underlying factors?

KEDOURIE: Yes, I think so. I think it was really quite hopeless to assume that it was possible to buy the machinery for whole industries and transplant it into these areas, and thus make them into modern states in the full meaning of the word. Of course you can buy all kinds of things if you have the money; but then you may not have much real use for them . . . as people who win lotteries and football pools very quickly discover.

ONE OTHER THING *before we finish with your criticism of Britain, and the attitude that she took (particularly after the First World War) in the Middle East to the creation of new states and the validity of Arab nationalism. Are you vulnerable to a charge, do you think, that you neglected the whole cost of the imperial enterprise to Britain? You talk about "a failure of will" being at the root of the problem. But why should we not think it was just the sheer cost of it? We didn't give up Kenya because of the Mau Mau; it was all too expensive. Isn't it the same with the Gulf?*

KEDOURIE: I'm always in difficulty with cost. If one is talking about private individuals, it's a question of "I would like this house but I cannot afford it". Cost is not exactly of the same kind when you're dealing with states (and I suspect the question of cost actually comes last), but it may well be used in political rhetoric to justify a particular decision taken on quite other grounds. The fact is it isn't something to do with a Budget, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer going to the House of Commons and saying, "Well, I can't raise enough revenue and therefore we have got to leave India." It has never been like that at all. The arguments were much more complicated and much less obvious.

Look at the way in which it was decided by the Labour Government of 1945 to leave India. If you look at what they were saying, what Prime Minister Attlee was arguing, what

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Stafford Cripps who was very much involved was pressing for, it had nothing to do really with the state of the Exchequer. And leaving India was the most important imperial abandonment in British history.

—Let's go to Africa just for a moment. Had we stayed on, or tried to stay on, isn't Portugal a very instructive example? Look what happened there.

KEDOURIE: Yes, well, what happened there?

—It was a shambles at home as well as abroad.

KEDOURIE: What happened there was that there was a revolt, a *coup d'état*, in Lisbon itself, on the mainland of Portugal in 1974, and these officers—many of them Marxists, also in one way or another (as the term goes) "anti-imperialists"—decided that it was time to let go. And let go they did. I don't really see that it was a question of Portugal being "too poor" to sustain it—that was not the argument at all.

ARE YOU CONTENT *with the following estimate of your contribution to the debate? It is acknowledged by some, who part company with you on other grounds, that Nationalism is not a universal or a self-evident proposition, and that you have shocked people out of that assumption. Are you happy with that as a verdict?*

KEDOURIE: Well I think that assumption, that proposition rather, is pretty well accepted now.

—But then how persuaded are you by the arguments of those, like Professor Ernest Gellner, who, while acknowledging the illumination you've brought to that particular problem, your insight that Nationalism need not be universal, still feels that the rest of your analysis is false? His opposing contention is that while Europe has been the origin of a disturbance spreading over most of the world, there is also the factor of modern productive methods, and mankind's irrevocable commitment to an industrial society. It is that which makes modern Nationalism more than either ideological accident or the fruit of resentment, but a necessity.

KEDOURIE: Gellner's is, of course, a very ambitious sociological argument, trying to establish a kind of nexus between a doctrine and its spread, and a type of economic organisation, namely industrialism. Unfortunately, the evidence does not support him, in the sense that Nationalism as a doctrine came to the fore in Europe in areas which were least industrialised, and it spread in Europe and outside Europe in places which were quite innocent of industrialisation. Nobody has ever assumed or claimed that people were nationalists because somehow or another they happened to be working in factories. When Gavrilo Princip murdered the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, he wasn't really moved by the lack of industries in Bosnia or Croatia or anything remotely related; he was driven by quite different emotions.

—But Professor Gellner says of your position that an explanation which puts things down solely to European thinkers, to an import into the Middle East, is artificial. He says that there's something bizarre in the suggestion that a force so widespread and pervasive, a flame that springs up so strongly and spontaneously in so many disparate places, should emanate from nothing more than some extremely abstruse lucubrations of philosophers. Ideas seldom have such power.

KEDOURIE: Nothing really "bizarre" about it, at least in the sense that the historian can follow the spread of this particular doctrine from place to place, and we can see that it is really all clearly derivative from European thinkers. Could there be anything more "bizarre" than the spread of Marxism in Russia, and in China, against all that Marxism itself would have argued was possible? And yet it happened. All that we can say is that this is what happened in history, and that (in the well-known tag) truth is stranger than fiction. So I don't really see that there is very much nowadays in this particular argument. Cambodia and Viet Nam and Ethiopia and China —they're all Marxist. Why should they be Marxist? It's all very bizarre, but not inexplicable or very mysterious.

IS IT BECAUSE *you are an enemy of "the modern world" (which you acknowledged early on) that you're dismissive of contemporary social and economic factors?*

KEDOURIE: No, I don't want to be "dismissive"; that would be very foolish. All one can say is that there is no general doctrine which would account, in an automatic kind of way, for a particular manifestation. What one has to do is to be very patient with the evidence, to follow it step by step, and then one will be in a much better position to account for what happened here or there or elsewhere in history. In the end one might well be able to say why it is that a particular doctrine or a particular state of affairs is to be found in this country, in that area, among this or that population, and so on.

—Here clearly is the stuff of an important and divisive argument in academia. Gellner holds that Nationalism is inherent in a certain set of social conditions, and they happen to be the conditions of our time; and this is something you reject.

KEDOURIE: I don't think really that one can establish it.

—However, he warns us—and how would you reassure us?—against following "a declared enemy of nationalism like Kedourie all the way, and treating nationalism as a contingent, avoidable aberration, accidentally spawned by European thinkers. . . ."

KEDOURIE: I don't think we can say that it is either avoidable or unavoidable. "Avoidable" and "unavoidable" are terms which have to do with taking action, with the future. It's absurd to talk about avoidable or unavoidable when what you have is what has happened in history. First of all, one finds out what it is that has happened, and in the second place one

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tries to account for it. And this is not made easy by general—how shall I put it—sociological, quote unquote, theories.

—*Journalistic?* . . .

KEDOURIE: Well, I don't know. I mean, these are to be found in heavy academic tomes, not journalism. . . .

YOUR INTEREST IN NATIONALISM *has arisen from your investigation of the impact which the European states, and their European ideas, have had in the Middle East. Would you agree that your analysis is not so much of Arab as of European politics, morals, and religion? And I'd also like to ask you whether you detect any significant shifts in "the spirit of the age" that you have so deplored?*

KEDOURIE: To be able to detect a shift in "the spirit of the age" in which one lives is, I think, very difficult. One is confronted every day with prognostications that nothing will be the same after this or that happening. . . . Shifts, I think, are a matter for hindsight; they are a matter really for historians and not for observers living in the middle of the shifts which are presumed to be happening. It is a very treacherous kind of ground, and I don't think that there would be much to be gained by straying on to it.

—*Treacherous or not, I'd like to ask whether you think that we are still making a defensive accommodation to political ideas which, in your view, have brought the Middle East to anarchy.*

KEDOURIE: Well, the anarchy is there. Anyone reading the newspapers or looking at television will agree that the anarchy is there.[2] What one does to deal with such anarchy is not something that can be specified in advance. Of course it all depends what one's interest is, and what it is that one has to safeguard. This is a military, a political, an economic issue which affects different countries differently. And therefore one can't say there is a general recipe for dealing with it, or that a specific recipe, whatever it is, is likely to succeed. It is surely easier to suggest what is *unlikely* to succeed, and this would include illusions, misunderstandings, ignorance, and nonsense of many kinds.

[2] See ENCOUNTER (September-October 1982), Elie Kedourie and Andrew Mango, "The Middle East: Illusions Great & Small."

A Spate of Funerals

The wind is getting up,
soughing round the chimneys.
Several mornings lately,
a new-made widow shivered
wondering why the hour
seemed longer and wider.
As wide as a grey sea
fed by northern rivers
come down from the hills.

Middle-aged women become
unwitting seafarers,
rowing and paddling,
striving to start engines,
poor navigators needing maps.
The born sailor will take
a compass reading, breathe deep
the fresh sea air,
continue the journey.

On the deep sea
there are many small ships.
Women sleep on board
buffeted by the waves;
the cold night hours
will be followed by dawn.
Widows wake in the morning
to find themselves
searching for dry land.

Pamela Lewis

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LAW

Dworkin's Empire

By Roger Scruton

THERE IS A consensus among legal philosophers that Ronald Dworkin is the author of a theory of law. But there is no consensus as to what the theory is. A substantial secondary literature exists, much of it as challenging as the work that it discusses, but it is difficult to derive from that literature either an unambiguous account of Dworkin's theory, or a considered assessment of its place in jurisprudence. To some extent the fault is not Dworkin's: it is part of his claim to our attention that he asks questions which are novel to the theory of law, and the implications of which have yet to be assessed. Nevertheless, it is also a reflection of Dworkin's style of argument that his message has remained, for all its critical impact, deeply obscure. *Law's Empire* will therefore arouses considerable interest: for it is an attempt to summarise, organise and continue the whole Dworkinian system.[1]

In earlier articles Dworkin forced his readers to consider the important question posed by the adjudication of a "hard case" in law. Either the law exists or it does not. If it is brought into being at the trial (by an act of "judicial legislation") then the criminal or the litigant is judged according to a law that did not exist at the time when his deed was performed. If, on the other hand, the law already exists, then how can the criminal or the litigant be blamed for his action, when even learned judges seem to be divided as to its legal consequences? How can the layman be said to have "advanced warning" of a trespass which no one has ever foreseen?

Those questions lead to others. What exactly happens when a court rules that some previous case was "wrongly decided"? What is it to "distinguish" a case, to "follow" a precedent, to "overrule" the decision of a lower court? Such questions force us to ask ourselves just what the law consists in, and just where it resides, in the tradition of adjudication to which we are accustomed. *Law's Empire* begins again from a selection of hard cases, but it does not linger over the immediate questions that they pose. Instead, the author ploughs at once into territory far more abstract, and far more fraught with conceptual difficulties, than any which he has entered before.

Dworkin argues that law, as "we" know it, is an interpretative activity. An interpretation is an attempt to give the *best* reading of some human artefact—the reading which shows it to be most suited to its final aim. Thus a critical interpretation of a work of art is an attempt to give the reading which accords to it the greatest aesthetic value. What the "best" reading consists in depends upon the activity discussed. Obviously the law is not a pursuit of aesthetic value, but of something else. Of what? One answer would be "justice"; but it is not, or at least not obviously, the answer that Dworkin gives. (Here is one of those points of strategic obscurity which, as in previous writings, blunt the impact of his argument.) Sometimes Dworkin emphasises the role of law in "guiding and constraining the power of government"—in other words, in serving as a guardian of individual rights. Sometimes he speaks of its function in resolving conflicts (it is characteristic of Dworkin that he is more interested in civil than in criminal law). In more theoretical passages he describes law as constrained by an ideal of integrity, and in the end this seems to be his preferred theory, albeit an obscure one. This search for the "best" reading of the law is carried out at many levels: in the law courts (when judges interpret the law; when they adjudicate hard cases; and when they try to reconcile their decisions with the relevant precedents); in the reflections of jurists (when they rationalise or criticise the decisions of the courts); in the arguments of legal philosophers (when they try to isolate and justify the underlying principles which motivate the less abstract levels of judicial enquiry).

For Dworkin, law should be seen neither as a command, nor as a convention, nor as a prediction, nor as a mere instrument of policy. Law is rather (according to his mood) an expression of civil, or moral, or constitutional rights; a realisation of a "political morality"; an embodiment of the "associative obligations" of the community over which it is exercised. If Dworkin shifts so rapidly and confidently between these various idioms, it is partly because he has a theory (which looms large, though it glimmers rather faintly in his stylistic twilight), according to which those functions of the law coincide.

It is by no means untypical of Dworkin that he should describe "our" law as a "protestant" activity (as though the common law were not established in the days of highest Popery, and as though it did not have the explicit sanction of the Canon Law). But what he means is that "we", in belonging to the peculiar legal tradition that is "ours", do in fact subscribe to a highly individualistic morality, which emphasises the rights of the individual against the authority of the sovereign power, and which is through and through "political" in its force and application. This condition of "political morality" defines the community to which "we" (and not just the readers of *The New York Review of Books*) all suppose ourselves to belong.

[1] *Law's Empire*. By RONALD DWORKIN. Belknap Press: Harvard University Press, $20.00, £16.95.

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THERE IS, OF COURSE, a certain sleight-of-hand here. In order to do justice to Dworkin's deeper insights, we should not, I think, take too seriously his desire to read his own secular egalitarianism into the law which has so far protected us from egalitarianism's worst excesses. Rather, we should attend to Dworkin's theory of community—or "fraternity", as he sometimes says, expressly invoking the political revolution which abolished the legal order and the rule of law in France.

Each system of law creates and is created by a "community", and this community has some of the character of a person, with an enduring burden of responsibility. We might say that the law aims to uphold the rights and responsibilities that are recognised within a community, and thereby to ensure the identity of that community through time—just as each individual ensures his individual identity by taking responsibility for his past and future actions. The obligations of a community are not contractual, but "associative", in the manner of family ties. That is to say, they are neither voluntary, nor of universal force; they are imposed upon us by the particular history and circumstances which we have inherited. "Integrity" is both more than consistency—since it cannot be achieved by consistency alone, any more than an individual can exonerate himself by always acting in the same way—and less than consistency, since it may be achieved equally by following and by departing from a series of precedents.

This is not to say that "consistency" is a clear idea, any more than is the idea of "convention" which Dworkin, in this part of his argument, seems to be attacking. I suspect that a deeper consideration of Wittgenstein's arguments about rule-following would lead Dworkin to be less confident in his view that a system of law is not a body of conventions.

In a highly charged and misleading analogy, Dworkin compares the law to a "chain novel"—a novel continued by many authors, with the common aim of producing a single and integrated work of art. In following a precedent, a judge is engaged in an act which both interprets what went before, and also changes the context of interpretation. The constraint is that he should endeavour to embody and to continue the "integrity" of the law—in other words, to uphold the rights and responsibilities which have been enshrined in the law by the community over which it adjudicates. The "integrity" of the law is, in the end, the same phenomenon as the personality of the community which it serves.

I HAVE SUMMARISED the theory as I understand it. I shall now express it in my own words: Law, as "we" know it, is not a body of rules but a tradition, and its significance lies not in its results but in its "meaning"—in that which we recuperate through interpretation. The law also expresses a corporate personality, which is that of a community in its political aspect. (In Hegel's terms: the state is the corporate personality of a civil society, and its will is law.) The law enshrines rights, responsibilities—and let me add, though Dworkin characteristically doesn't, duties—and carries them forward from generation to generation.

The process of adjudication requires specific institutions—for example, judicial independence and an authoritative record of past decisions. But it depends even more upon a certain "public spirit", generated by the common allegiance of those who are subject to it. This allegiance is neither contractual nor universal, but the record of a common destiny. (In Hegel's terms: it is a bond, not of contract, but of piety.)

If I remark that such a theory of law has already been defended in the name of political conservatism, it is not in order to discount any claim to originality on Dworkin's part—for his way of arriving at those conclusions is marked at every point by a distinctive and exuberant intellect. It is rather to draw attention to Dworkin's isolation from all traditions of thought outside the fields of Anglo-American jurisprudence and analytical philosophy. Dworkin would have spared his reader much trouble had he realised the extent to which his conclusions had been anticipated by Burke, de Maistre, and Hegel. And while this would have meant renouncing one of his favourite postures—that of the enlightened liberal, who has yet to be convinced that there is such a thing as intellectual conservatism—it would have forced him to confront the enormous disharmony that exists between his defence of "our" legal tradition, and his combative advocacy of the causes (such as reverse discrimination) which are currently destroying it.

DWORKIN is convinced that "we" know what "we" mean, when "we" refer to the law as "we" understand it, and that what "we" mean is derivable from the handful of "hard cases" with which he begins his treatise. Moreover, Dworkin's "we" is defined so narrowly as to embody no antecedent idea of the distinction between those who are governed by law and those who are not. His examples are taken from English and American law, and are discussed in the light of the common law principles of precedent and *stare decisis* (though without reference to the important distinction between common law and equity). Most of the world is governed by systems of law which, ostensibly at least, do *not* obey those principles. Many European countries have legal systems based on the *Code Napoléon*, in which the doctrine of precedent is officially repudiated (at least in the form adopted by the English courts). Nevertheless, those countries are governed by a rule of law, and by a system of appeal which effectively guarantees individual rights.

Dworkin never once mentions the *Code Napoléon*, nor the many similar codified systems which have grown up in imitation of it. Nor does he mention Roman Law, even though that law contains interesting devices whereby hard cases can be reconciled with underlying principle. Nor does he mention Canon Law—the foundation of European criminal justice: nor Islamic law, in which there is genuine adjudication, judicial interpretation, and judicial independence, even though "what the law says" has been spoken for all time by the Prophet. (The traditions of Islamic Law would have provided Dworkin with a very good example of a legal system which is constrained by "integrity", without showing the slightest trace of the secular, liberal ideology to which "we"

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subscribe. Indeed, the justification of a judgment from a *hagīth* conforms more exactly to Dworkin's theory of legal reasoning than does the practice of the English Common Law.)

The most serious omission of all, given the fact that over a third of the world is ostensibly governed by it, is Communist Law. This has judges, advocates and statutes, but no authoritative precedents, no proper legal record, and no judicial independence. Perhaps Communist law is not law? Or perhaps it *is* law, but without a *rule* of law?

DWORKIN'S CONCLUSIONS are conceptually rather weak, and it is difficult to derive from them any answer to such questions. But the questions are not merely verbal. On the contrary, the possibilities of international adjudication, and of peace-keeping through treaty and law, now depend on the answer to them. And why does Dworkin never mention International Law, that most controversial of all claimants to the title? Had he considered at least some of these rival systems, he might have concluded not only that "we" are a far smaller group than he imagines, but also that there is need for a theory that is wider in scope, richer in concepts, and less dependent on a one-sided diet of examples than the theory which he has given us.

Such a wider theory would, I believe, make use of a concept from which Dworkin, in his urbane distaste for authority, turns constantly away: the concept of sovereignty. In considering that concept he would perhaps be less happy to dismiss the theory that law is, at bottom, a system of command. Of course, the "sovereign" may be (as Hobbes argued) a corporate person, not wholly separable from the courts of law. But that does not destroy the imperative force of his edicts.

Dworkin's failure to consider the idea of sovereignty is of a piece with his optimistic vision of man. Unlike Hobbes, Hegel, or de Maistre, Dworkin has not looked into the abyss. He has not responded in his innermost being to the moral and political catastrophe that has everywhere attended the flight from authority.

Neither terrorism nor its institutionalised form in totalitarian government cast their shadow across Dworkin's empire. Dworkinian man is a creature already securely governed by law, and safely protected by its edicts. It is therefore easier for Dworkin than it is for many of his critics

Verily, "Respect" is "Contempt"—or the Legal Lunch

London

MR JUSTICE STAUGHTON, *a judge in the Commercial Court, has become irritated at the linguistic duplicity of counsel, and the way in which they use archaic and superfluous frills and curlicues to camouflage what is at bottom, an insult. The judge wants more plain English used in courts, and less of the legal language of the obscure past, some of which he says has been "obsolete in ordinary speech almost since the Authorised Version of the Bible."*

He particularly dislikes the use of words like **"verily"**, *and he has no time for counsel who* **"crave"**, *whether it be his indulgence or anything else.*

Words like **"humbly"** *and* **"respectfully"** *are not only unnecessary in written legal documents, they are generally untruthful in oral argument, says the judge with utmost respect.*

JUDGES THEMSELVES **are, of course, not entirely free of guilt in the matter of exchanges which are not only florid, but coded.**

As the courtroom clock moves towards 1 p.m., counsel might say:

"It might be of value to Your Lordship if I were to inform you at this juncture that I have several more questions to ask of this witness which would take some little while."

The judge will reply:

"This seems a useful time to adjourn."

What they really mean is lunch.

The learned judge takes exception to barristers who preface a statement to him with the phrase **"With respect"**. *What that really means, says the judge is* **"You are wrong"**.

A statement prefaced with the words **"With great respect"** *means* **"You are utterly wrong"**.

And if a barrister produces the ultimate weapon of **"With utmost respect"** *he is really saying to the court,* **"Send for the men in white coats."**

London

SIR, **With reference to Mr Justice Staughton's plea for plainer English in courts, in my humble submission archaic dress begets archaic speech. But does Mr Justice Staughton really understand the important function of "politeness forms" if he can suggest that "with great respect" simply means "You are utterly wrong"?**

THINK HOW OFTEN *we now avoid the plain English question, "What is your name?" in ordinary social or commercial encounters. Instead there is a range of oblique forms such as "Your name is . . . ?" and "What did you say your name was?"*

Directory Inquiries staff now commonly use the special formula "How are you spelling that?" presumably because, as recent surveys of illiteracy remind us, millions of people in Britain find any question beginning "How do you spell? . . ." confrontational and alarming.

SO THE **"with respect" formula signals not merely disagreement but also an often costly effort to reduce the level of aggression. Dispensing with politeness forms would make legal processes even more blatently adversarial and threatening than they are now.**

THE TIMES

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to accept a "political morality" which corrodes the ideas of duty and obligation, in the interests of an "equality" that is neither achievable nor desirable. For Dworkin, law is not the great artefact which establishes political order, so much as an instrument by which that order is once again eroded, in obedience to the antinomian force of human resentment.

As an account of the connection between the common law tradition and a particular style of government (the style which I would call "personal"), *Law's Empire* is of considerable value, illuminated by characteristic insights, and sustained throughout by a wealth of argument. Its central discussion is sure to prove important, if not in jurisprudence, at least in political philosophy.

My principal reservation concerns the concept of "interpretation". To say that the purpose of interpreting an activity is to give the "best" version of it is to say very little. (We do not say what football is by arguing that the purpose of football is to play football well.) We need a more nuanced theory of what the "best" consists in. Dworkin, like Hans-Georg Gadamer[2] (to whom he refers in the crucial passage) makes much of the example of language. And it is of course true that language provides our central example of interpretation: to understand another I must interpret his speech. But which is the "best" interpretation? If there is a general aim of communication, it is enshrined in the concept of truth. But the best interpretation of another's utterance is not necessarily the one which makes it true. Sometimes people are mistaken; sometimes they lie, or are confused. Must we always rewrite their meanings so as to remove these defects?

Similarly, the best interpretation of the sovereign's edicts is not necessarily the one that reconciles them with a tradition of adjudication, or with a liberal "political morality". The sovereign too can be less than perfect. This is particularly obvious in the attitude of the English courts to Parliament. A judge might dearly wish to interpret the 1968 Rent Act[3] as though it had an unseen negation sign in front of it—in that way he could reconcile it with the traditions of English property law. But he cannot do that. By the standards of tradition, and equally by the standards of morality, the "best" interpretation of this statute is not the interpretation which captures its meaning: i.e. which shows the intention of Parliament. Nevertheless, Parliament (or the Queen in Parliament) is sovereign, and must be obeyed.

The priority of equity over the common law gives to the judges a residual power of justice, even in those cases where Parliament has commanded unwisely. (It is a defect of Dworkin's discussion that he does not discuss the use of this power—for example, by Lord Denning, in his attempt to confer on a mistress the legal privileges of a wife.) Despite this, however, the judges do not have the power to interpret Parliament's intentions according to some version of Quine's principle of charity,[4] so that everything enacted by Parliament is automatically made compatible with the moral sense.

Perhaps Dworkin is not as familiar with the English law and its principles of interpretation as he implicitly claims to be. But if that is so, then he ought not to conclude his book with the sentence: "That is what law is for us; for the people we want to be and the community we aim to have."

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[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer, expositor of "hermeneutics", whose *Truth and Method* (1979) contains a vague but influential plea for the priority of interpretation over explanation in the human sciences.

[3] The Act which summarised and carried forward the provisions of "rent control" and "security of tenure" and which in effect turned a tenant's contractual right into a right of property, so alienating the landlord's right of property against his will.

[4] See W. V. Quine, *Word and Object* (1960), pp. 59-60.

A Charm for Maurice

Only just arrived, only just alive,
a bare kilo for special care,
premature baby boy grown man
in more minds than mine, gramme by gramme
add weight to hopes we hardly dare
breathe for a future where you'll thrive

unfussed, unfêted, undiscussed
for days on end, where you can sleep
heavily in your room next door
to Graham and Tanya, or deftly core
their apple of sleep with your most sweet
incisive cries, if you must.

But now in an incubator, fed through the nose,
shielded by perspex, by nurses, by prayer,
Thursday's child, with so far to go
to wear your folded baby clothes,
journey to the threshold of fresh air,
outgrowing this poem and putting on prose.

Michael Laskey

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EAST & WEST

Letter from Taipei

The Strange Case of Taiwan

By Paul Hollander

AS READERS of ENCOUNTER may recall, some years ago I wrote a book entitled *Political Pilgrims*, excerpts of which were published in these pages on several occasions.[1] It dealt with the susceptibilities of Western intellectuals toward political systems such as the Soviet Union under Stalin, Mao's China, and Castro's Cuba, and examined their experiences in the countries concerned, including their exposure to what I called "the techniques of political hospitality". Subsequently I wrote several articles on the revival of the same phenomenon in Nicaragua, which has become the most popular destination of political tourists and pilgrims in recent years.[2] In all these instances my work was based on published materials: primarily the reports of the visitors, and various other sources on the conditions of life in the countries concerned.

I myself had never been on a "conducted tour" of any kind, much less on a political tour or pilgrimage.[3] My travel interests have always been separate from my political sympathies, and from my social-scientific fact-finding impulses. I was saved from any temptation to embark on a political pilgrimage by the fact that most countries providing such services are ruled by political systems I find singularly unappealing: political hospitality is most highly developed in countries where ideas are treated as "weapons", i.e. in Marxist-Leninist systems. Not only was I not favourably predisposed toward the countries most apt to dispense political hospitality—and thus lacking in the basic qualification of a potential pilgrim—I was also an unsuitable candidate in the eyes of the appropriate authorities. Thus I had good reason to resign myself to remaining deprived, although over the years I had often been told that as a student of political tourism I ought to experience it at first hand.

Recently an unusual opportunity presented itself which I thought might give me at least partial exposure to those situations and experiences. I was invited to attend a conference (on developments in Mainland China) and to go to Taiwan as "a guest of the Government Information Office of the Republic of China on Taiwan". I was to take part in unspecified sight-seeing activities and give a lecture or two.

Up to that point I hadn't given Taiwan much thought; I knew little about it and had no strong feelings. It was not a country I had ever expected to visit, or which held any great personal or political interest for me, but I had a reasonably open mind about it, somewhat "tainted" by a mild sympathy. After all, it was a Western-oriented country and had come into existence by virtue of the opposition of its rulers to Communist China, which under Mao became one of the most repressive totalitarian systems of our times. As for Chiang Kai-shek and his heirs, I subscribe to the belief that there are significant differences between authoritarian and totalitarian systems, and that these can be detected without undue intellectual exertion.

WHAT WERE the Taiwanese practices of political hospitality and how did they resemble, or differ from, those I had written about in the context of Communist systems?

There was an obvious irony to the situation. Here I was, the author of a lengthy study critically dissecting the gullibility of pampered visitors to the Kremlin, the Forbidden City, the old town of Havana, ready to expose myself to similar treatment dispensed by government officials who would obviously wish me to absorb highly favourable impressions. I wanted to learn about the effects of such a conducted tour, but I felt uneasy, although surely the Taiwanese authorities would never approach the heavy-handed determination conveyed, for instance, by Tomas Borge, the Minister of Interior (i.e. state security) of Nicaragua:

> "Nicaragua's war is fought inside the United States. . . . The battlefield will be the American conscience. . . . When they [the visitors] return to the United States they have a multiplier effect on the public opinion of your country."[4]

Assuming the role of respectfully treated political tourist and guest of the government is very agreeable: a large black air-conditioned American car was at my disposal from 9 a.m.

[1] *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba* (1981). "The Ideological Pilgrim—Then and Now", ENCOUNTER, November 1973; "Pilgrims on the Run" (Parts I and II, ENCOUNTER, October and November 1981). See also "Pilgrims on the Run (revisited)", ENCOUNTER Pamphlet No. 16 (1986).

[2] "Sojourners in Nicaragua", *National Catholic Register*, 29 May 1983; "The Newest Political Pilgrims", *Commentary*, August 1985; "Political Tourism in Cuba and Nicaragua", *Society*, May 1986.

[3] The distinction is slight: political pilgrims, as I used the term in the book, refer primarily to intellectuals of some distinction who visit certain countries with highly positive anticipations and are given VIP treatment; political tourists are similarly disposed but more numerous, less fervent, and lacking in personal distinction. To put it more simply, pilgrims are more devout than tourists. Like all tourism, political tourism is a mass phenomenon, as in Nicaragua today.

[4] Juan Tamayo, "The Sandinistas Aim Soft Sell at Activists", *Miami Herald*, 14 December 1983.

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until the evening hours, with a chauffeur and guide-interpreter; doors were opened in front of me and umbrellas held over my head; I was handsomely accommodated in a large and luxurious hotel. My young guide, a part-time graduate student in American studies, was anxious to please, and solicitous for my safety and well-being. It all took some getting used to. I was very well fed both in and outside the hotel, and was given a number of small presents (a small tea-set; tea; books about Taiwan; a large basket of fresh fruit; cuff-links and tie clip with the insignia of the Republic of China). All this matched the standard "ego-massage" of any country's public-relations apparatus.

A further component of ego-massage is the effort to make the visitor feel important by more subtle means, such as the company of important officials. I had an hour's interview with the head of the Government Information Office (PhD, Columbia University). I shook hands with the Prime Minister. I was met by a high official of the ruling Nationalist Party (PhD, Harvard) in his office. On all occasions photographs were taken.

THE DIFFERENCES begin with the itinerary that was devised for me and the responsiveness to my requests to change it. Most striking was its apolitical character. There was little effort to show me "showcase projects" reflecting economic, social, or cultural accomplishments. Also (unlike Communist countries, where the itineraries, typically packed, make it difficult for the visitor to have unsupervised time and wander around freely) I had ample time to do as I pleased.

For the first day of my visit, the schedule read: *9.30 a.m.*: Visit Confucian Temple; *10.30*: Lungshan (Dragon Mountain Temple); *11.30*: Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall; *14.00*: "Window on China" (small-scale reproductions of historic buildings). All these were in or near Taipei.

In the course of my eight days in Taiwan I was not taken to a single factory, farm, clinic, hospital, new housing project, construction site, kindergarten, or school (except the Chinese Opera School). I was not taken to meet heroic and happy workers, peasants, or office clerks, who would describe how their lives had changed since the régime had been established; I was not taken to a mass meeting or rally. On one drive (returning from the "Window on China" display), we stopped at my request at a hydroelectric plant and reservoir which I spotted on the map. My guide had little to say about it. Evidently in Taiwan, as in Western countries, such things are taken for granted—treated as ordinary utilitarian installations rather than semi-sacred legitimating objects which prove the spiritual superiority of the political system.

We made an unscheduled stop at a Wildlife Safari Park but there were no suggestions that it testified to the wisdom of the government and its solicitousness toward the recreational needs of the citizens. Nor were self-congratulatory remarks occasioned by a drive on the recently completed superhighway linking the north and south of the Island. The "aboriginals", the non-Chinese inhabitants (they number about 200,000 out of a total population of almost 20 million), performed dances at their cultural centre, but my guide did not seize the opportunity to instruct me about the authorities' benevolent cultural-social policies which allowed the preservation of ancient customs and ways-of-life.

The most explicitly political sights were the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial (a giant building with a large museum) and a military shrine dedicated to various "martyrs". The most explicitly economic sight, the Taiwan Trade Centre, is a huge modern exhibition-hall where virtually everything made in Taiwan is displayed under one roof for the convenience of foreign buyers or businessmen.

Throughout all our sightseeing activities my official guide made no attempt to impress me with the enlightened policies and accomplishments of the government. He responded eagerly to my questions about various shrines and temples; religious beliefs; heights of mountains; distances between various points; but did not always have the answer.

Exploring Taipei on foot, alone, I found a visible military presence—railroad bridges and public buildings guarded by armed troops; guards of honour at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial and the Martyrs' Shrine; barracks and other military installations. But I encountered no part of the island "off limits" to visitors (except military bases); and no warnings against taking photographs (these can be found even in such "liberal" Communist countries as Hungary).

I had read about a "natural wonder" of Taiwan—a huge gorge in the mountain range in the east-central part of the island. I wanted to look at it, and the trip required a whole day. Our scheduled activities were cancelled, and we took an electric train, traversing a scenic coastal route, continued by car, and then flew back by plane to Taipei. I thoroughly enjoyed the marble cliffs, waterfalls, temples on mountainsides. But did the trip contribute to my appreciation of government policies, or serve any other political purpose? To be sure, the pleasant outing was bound to put me in a genial frame of mind. Was this the way to create a generally sympathetic disposition toward the authorities who arranged it? Certainly it would be naive to suggest that only explicitly and heavy-handed political tours can influence the visitor.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, I was not hindered in the slightest from behaving like a regular tourist seeking out signs and sounds of no political significance—very different from the experience of visitors to Communist countries such as Cuba, where in the words of an English traveller:

> ". . . the tourist . . . is dispatched in pursuit of factories, schools, universities, housing projects and research institutes . . . his holiday is not treated as an escape . . . but as a chance to penetrate the virtues of the socialist model."[5]

Actually the temples and shrines, both old and new—exotic, colourful, intricately decorated—did have political significance. For they were not showpieces saved and maintained for the benefit of tourists but were well-attended

[5] David Caute, *Cuba Yes?* (1974), p. 49.

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places of worship. Found everywhere throughout Taiwan, they were usually thronged by worshippers performing religious rites—praying, making food offerings, lighting candles and sticks of incense—in short, practising their religion. They were among the reminders of the differences between authoritarian and totalitarian systems—systems which legitimate themselves by a total ideology and those which do not.

BOTHERSOME QUESTIONS intrude. Did I have a chance to see poverty or poor neighbourhoods? Could I learn about the restrictions on free speech which had been established by the officially-proclaimed "state of siege" since 1949? What about the critics of the régime, the discontented, the Opposition politicians?

I did not speak to any members of the Opposition (nor did I make such a request, hence I don't know what the response might have been), but I understand from Western specialists that such contacts are not difficult to make. I put it down to my limited fact-finding zeal rather than official policy that I did not tap this source of information.

"Slums" were certainly not part of the officially planned itinerary, but neither was there any discernible attempt to shield me from them. I did see Taipei's poor neighbourhoods and dilapidated housing, but no people sleeping on the streets, or lying in the gutter, no emaciated children or derelicts scrounging in garbage-cans. Nor did I see open sewers, or people carrying buckets to a communal well or water-faucet, though I caught a glimpse from the train of a group of women doing their washing in a stream.

Did I see beggars, and the poorly-dressed, the ill-fed? I did not, but beggars can be removed from the street by authorities who do not view begging as a basic human right. Pedestrians on the street (especially the women) were well dressed, in Western style. Both Taipei and the two large provincial cities I saw—Hualien on the east coast and Keelung in the north—are extremely busy, bustling, vibrant, with an impressive range of goods and services for sale. No queues anywhere. There are cars, buses, trucks, a vast number of motorcycles and scooters, but hardly any bicycles, and no horse-drawn carts.

DID "POLITICAL HOSPITALITY" achieve its objectives? There is no doubt that kind, generous and attentive treatment can soften even a searchingly critical disposition. On the other hand, I had a high degree of self-consciousness about these matters, and an opportunity to discuss Taiwan at some length with a number of old China and Taiwan hands (they attended the conference and had been to both Chinas many times). And Taiwan allows foreign social scientists and journalists to conduct independent inquiries and studies; government figures and statistics are subject to independent verification and challenge.

What of substance did I learn about Taiwan? The most unexpected conclusion I came away with was that Taiwan is the kind of country the Political Pilgrims *should* admire. It is a country which Western intellectuals concerned with welfare, with material progress, economic development, and beneficial modernisation should make their favoured destination. Certainly it meets many of the criteria they used to justify sympathy toward Marxist-Leninist systems of far more modest material accomplishments and with a far worse record on political and personal freedoms. Moreover, Taiwan is a country where the venerable (and generally dubious) rationalisation offered in many Third World countries and Marxist-Leninist systems to explain the denial of civil rights has some validity. In Taiwan, it can be argued, limits on civil rights and political opposition did contribute to the kind of political stability which in turn made significant material progress possible.

FEW COUNTRIES can claim a more impressive record on material progress. Between 1953 and 1984 the average annual growth-rate of its economy was 8.8%. Per-capita GNP increased from $100 in 1952 to $3,067 in 1984 (as against approximately $300 in Mainland China). With one of the highest population densities in the world and without any significant natural resources (and only 25% of the area is arable land), it has become an exporter of food.[6]

Those who consider the campaigns against illiteracy in countries like Cuba and Nicaragua the most heartwarming achievements of these régimes, should also be impressed by the fact that in approximately three decades illiteracy in Taiwan has been reduced from over half of the population to under 7%. In addition, ". . . nearly 90% [of families] own refrigerators, over 60% own either an automobile or motorcycle . . . life expectancy has increased from 44 years in 1949 to 72 years today."[7] According to the most recent figures, 83% of the homes have telephones; 78% washing machines; 97% colour television sets; and 30% air-conditioning.[8]

Such modernisations were accompanied by a more egalitarian income distribution: "Whereas in the early 1950s the ratio of the average family income of the top 20% of the population and that of the lowest 20% was approximately 15 to 1, by 1984 it had narrowed to about 4 to 1. . . ."[9] As a result of the land reform of the early 1950s 90% of farmland is held by owner-farmers.

Such advances were made under difficult political conditions. The necessity of maintaining large military forces drained the economy. American economic assistance ceased in the mid-1960s. The gains are even more striking when compared with those of Cuba, a country of comparable size and resources with only half the population to support and

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[6] See *Republic of China 1986—A Reference Book* (1986), pp. 193-199.

[7] A. James Gregor and Maria Hsia Chang, *The Republic of China and U.S. Policy—A Study in Human Rights* (Washington D.C., 1983), pp. 31, 64.

[8] *Free China Journal*, 8 September 1986, p. 4.

[9] *Republic of China 1986—A Reference Book*, p. 99. For an American study of these and other accomplishments, see John C. H. Fei, Gustav Ranis, and Shirley W. Y. Kuo, *Growth with Equity: The Taiwan Case* (1979).

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the beneficiary of significant and continuous Soviet aid.[10]

By any standard, we should consider Taiwan one of the few great success stories of modernisation in the post-World War II period. Yet it has attracted little attention among Western intellectuals who have supposedly been concerned with efficient and humane policies of modernisation. Why were the many failed experiments of regimented, coercive modernisation in putatively socialist countries given every benefit of the doubt, and often fulsome praise?

I THINK A MAJOR PART of the explanation is that those proclaiming the blessings of modernisation in Marxist-Leninist systems had other "agendas", other private and psychological interests, over and above "material progress" and "economic development", and "the good of the common man". Their underlying interest was not so much economic-developmental but rather spiritual-ideological. The main appeal of the countries endorsed by the Political Pilgrims was their "sense of purpose" and "sense of community". Material accomplishments in themselves, without the ennoblement of a great ideological-spiritual design, were of limited interest. Thus, for example, for Beatrice and Sidney Webb (as for many other Western intellectuals) what mattered was not so much the specific institutional accomplishments but the underlying higher purpose. "The marvel was", Professor Gertrude Himmelfarb wrote, "not that there should be parks, hospitals, factories . . . [in the Soviet Union]; after all these could be found in England as well. The marvel was that they should, as the Webbs thought, be inspired by a collective ideal, a single moral purpose."

For Western intellectuals disposed to the admiration of Marxist-Leninist societies there was always a qualitative difference between identical material objects found in the putative socialist as opposed to the despised capitalist setting. Soviet construction projects symbolised a transcendence of the human condition. As Pablo Neruda wrote:

> "I shall never forget my visit to that hydroelectric plant overlooking the lake, whose pure waters mirror Armenia's unforgettable blue sky. When the journalists asked me for my impressions of Armenia's ancient churches . . . I answered them . . . : The church I like best is the hydroelectric plant, the temple beside the lake."

Many similar comments were made about "the miracles" of Soviet industrialisation. Many Western visitors seemed oblivious to the simple fact that they were describing inherently ordinary objects—factories, hydroelectric plants, bridges, schoolhouses. Under capitalism these would stimulate little excitement. All such inherently prosaic objects were transformed, in the eyes of the beholders, by their purpose and content.

Indifference, or aversion, to a society like Taiwan on the part of Western liberals confirms this. The material achievements of a political system that is both pro-American and largely capitalistic do not appeal to the moral-ideological sensibilities of a large portion of the Western intelligentsia; such systems just cannot be given any measure of moral credit for their accomplishments. And this applies not only to Taiwan, but also to Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia.

Taiwan's high standard of living can, of course, be dismissed as yet another example of "empty affluence" or "compulsive consumerism" conferred by a bourgeois economy undeserving of moral support or sympathy. Evidently such Western social critics believe that material deprivation under socialism is preferable to capitalist material fulfilment.

BUT TAIWAN could claim the sympathy of Western intellectuals on grounds other than material progress. A victimised, underdog vision of many Marxist-Leninist countries was one of their attractions: the Soviet Union in its devastated early years (also historically victimised by foreign aggressors); China, exploited by the Western powers through much of its recent history and painfully backward; little Cuba kept under American imperialist domination; and now tiny Nicaragua, bullied by the United States. Economic underdevelopment in these countries also conferred an aura of innocence. The huge obstacles to be overcome on the upward path to progress lent an heroic touch to their exertions.

Taiwan could certainly claim "underdog" status, and the sympathy that goes with it. It is a small country (not much bigger than The Netherlands) confronting a giant, hostile power—Communist China, eager to gobble it up. Not only is Taiwan small in area and population, its armed forces too are dwarfed by those of mainland China, which

> "has almost 10-12 superiority over ROC [Taiwan] in personnel and is superior in most categories of major military equipment. In 1981 [it] had about 4.7 million men under arms . . . [its] navy of some 2,650 vessels . . . [including] 100 fully armed attack submarines . . . the ROC maintains about half a million men under arms. Its navy has about 340 combatant units including . . . 2 unarmed submarines. . . ."

In other words, Communist China has been in a position to impose a naval blockade on Taiwan that would economically strangle and thus politically undermine the system. Hence the Taiwanese are genuinely threatened, and their sense of threat has as much (or far more) plausibility than that routinely invoked by Communist régimes to urge their population to greater exertions and justify drastic restrictions of personal and group freedoms. Taiwan has lost much, if not all, of the American military umbrella that protected it before the USA re-established diplomatic relations with Mainland China; and it has become diplomatically isolated as other nations broke off relations.

But even if some credit were to be given to Taiwan's achievements, and even if it is allowed that it is indeed a small and beleaguered nation, Western intellectuals intent on rejecting it can fall back on deploring its undemocratic domestic policies. They can argue that it is a Right-wing

[10] Gary S. Becker, "Cuba's Record Can't Compare With Taiwan's 'Miracle'", *Business Week*, 16 June 1986.

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authoritarian system dominated by the remnants of the former Nationalist régime, which does not tolerate political pluralism and real opposition.[11]

WHICH BRINGS US to yet another noteworthy paradox and double standard. Western observers inclined to give benefit of doubt to most Third World dictatorships, which are allegedly determined to modernise and improve the material well-being of their people, explain and excuse human rights violations and undemocratic practices by arguing that: (*a*) it is unreasonable and "ethnocentric" to expect all countries of the world to adopt "Western-style democracy"; (*b*) that such countries have more important tasks than worrying about the niceties and luxuries of democracy; (*c*) that the maintenance of political stability is vital for economic progress, hence the necessity to limit internal competition for political power; and, finally (*d*) that many such countries, including the Soviet Union in the 1920s or '30s, or Cuba and Nicaragua more recently, face external threats which further justify restrictions on civil liberties and free expression.

On all these counts, Taiwan's authoritarianism can also be viewed with a similarly benign and understanding attitude. Why *should* it have "Western-style democracy" when most of the world does not? Why, given its beleaguered position and diplomatic isolation *should it not* feel threatened? Given these threats, why *should* it be as tolerant of its domestic critics and enemies as the authorities of stable and secure Western democracies are? Why *would not* securing "positive freedoms"—i.e. economic welfare benefits and progress, such as employment, better public health, access to education, social mobility, a more egalitarian income-distribution, etc.—sometimes require a trade-off in tighter political controls? Moreover, as Professors Gregor and Chang point out in their study of human rights in Taiwan:

> "The citizens of the Republic of China on Taiwan enjoy far more of the social and economic rights . . . than citizens of any Marxist régime and more than those in some authoritarian régimes in Asia and Africa. But more important, they enjoy those human rights along with more abundant civil and political freedom."

There is little doubt that the human and civil rights violations in Taiwan have been far more limited than those institutionalised by Communist régimes and "nothing remotely akin to the mass murders and expulsions that have figured so prominently in the post-revolutionary history of Marxist régimes. . . ."[12] It is also of some significance that the high degree of coercion and regimentation that citizens of Communist systems generally experience is not balanced by impressive gains in their standard of living, in some instances not even by political stability. Mainland China was not only exceptionally repressive under Mao, and plagued by shortages—it was also a "chronically unstable" political system.[13]

MY VISIT to Taiwan—as a "political tourist", if you will—was instructive on several counts. It deepened my realisation that the distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian systems is neither an "empty abstraction" nor "a weapon in the Cold War" but a social-political reality that is clearly reflected in the way people live.

My trip also confirmed that the attraction of other political systems has less to do with their tangible accomplishments than with the desires and expectations of those attracted to them. The beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. To say the least, Taiwan, "on the Right", is on no count morally, politically, or economically inferior to the societies "on the Left" which charmed our Political Pilgrims and elicited the accolades of Western intellectuals and other political tourists. Nor can most members of the United Nations (from which Taiwan has been excluded) boast of superior political, economic, or cultural accomplishments. That Taiwan's social progress has received so little recognition is more a reflection of the predisposition of Western intellectuals and opinion-makers than an accurate measure of the defects or injustices of its social-political system.

[11] The December 1986 elections in Taiwan indicate that its authorities are far more willing to tolerate opposition and an incipient pluralism than any Left-wing authoritarian régime has been. (See also Harvey J. G. Feldman, "Taiwan Moves Toward a Two-Party System", *New York Times*, 27 December 1986.)

[12] Gregor and Chang, *The Republic of China and U.S. Policy*, pp. 41, 90, 95.

[13] See, for example, Alan P. L. Liu, "How Can We Evaluate the Political System on Mainland China?" Paper presented at the 15th Sino-American Conference on Mainland China (Taipei, Taiwan), June 1986.

Nature's Call

A flaccid flasher can get off in court
by pleading Nature's call, a policeman told
me once. "He's had it though, if caught erect."

The Law upholds Man's right to urinate.
Gents, unlike Ladies, usually aren't closed
during night hours. Men are the leakier sex.
It must be so—they're always telling me
they're off to pee—a sort of verbal flash,
I think.

Fiona Pitt-Kethley

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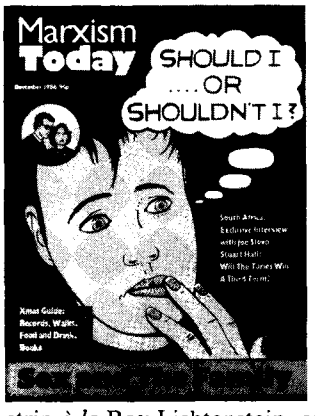
PRESS

The New Scene of "Marxism Today"

By Ferdinand Mount



THE OLD STRAP-LINE—"*Theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party*"—has long been banished from the cover. It is still to be found on the contents page above the staff list, but in a type one-third of the size it used to be. Otherwise, all is changed, changed utterly; a terrible trendiness is born. The covers themselves exploit every trick of the designer's art: an imitation comic strip *à la* Roy Lichtenstein, cartoons in the tradition of Giles and Gillray, full-page colour photographs of a prominent politician as in *Time* or *Newsweek*, geometric shapes vaguely recalling Miró or Mondrian, even *Spitting-Image*-style puppets. The cover-lines are snappy and enticing: SEX & THE FAMILY; THE GORBACHOV MYSTIQUE, or quite simply (in letters three inches high) the tabloid's present standby, AIDS. This is unashamedly, provocatively, Designer-socialism.

Nor is this merely an external, superficial change—jazzy wrapping on an otherwise unaltered product. (One slips easily into the advertising jargon.) Inside, the tone is friendly, the style accessible. Most of the articles concern subjects which are in the daily news, not arcane Left-wing obsessions; and the writers refer to concrete events, facts, statistics, for all the world like an ordinary capitalist newspaper. Perhaps more significant still, echoing the photographs of well-known political personalities on the cover, the doings and sayings of individual political leaders occupy quite as much space as the dialectical relationships of abstractions, theories, and tendencies. The new *Marxism Today* seems prepared to contemplate the possibility that *persons* as well as *isms* may make history.

The random selection of issues in front of me includes articles on the following subjects (I give the dates to demonstrate the consistency of the magazine's approach under the energetic editorship of Mr Martin Jacques):

September 1983: Labour's historic defeat in the General Election; worse could follow. Now is the time for some serious thinking.

Council housing on the retreat; increasing importance of owner occupation.

October 1984: The face of Labour's future: Eric Hobsbawm interviews Neil Kinnock. (The questions were searching and rather pessimistic about Labour's chances, being based largely on the assumption of Mrs Thatcher's continued "hegemony"—to use the sort of word not much found in *Marxism Today* nowadays.)

December 1984: Sheila Rowbotham on the need to revive the fading utopian dreams on the Left. John Gittings on China's turn towards decentralisation and the market.

October 1986: Beatrix Campbell, a regular columnist, writes a disillusioned piece about the new-look Labour Party.

David Steel is interviewed by Malcolm Rutherford and Martin Jacques.

Andreas Whittam Smith is interviewed about the prospects for *The Independent*.

December 1986: No Light At The End Of The Tunnel. Stuart Hall argues that "the nightmare is far from over" and that the Tories look a likely bet for a third term.

Philip Whitehead discusses Norman Tebbit and the BBC, expressing doubts as to whether the BBC will stand up to the government.

January 1987: The Sid In Us All: how privatisation has ushered in a profound shift in attitudes to share ownership.

February 1987: Beatrix Campbell examines why Labour councils are so vulnerable to being tarred with the "Loony Left" brush.

And so on. There are, of course, plenty of other articles pushing standard Leftist lines on standard Leftist subjects in the traditional language. But the list above is by no means untypical. Several features are, I think, worth picking out from it. First, the readiness not only to use non-Marxist or anti-Marxist writers and interviewees but also to let them speak for themselves.

I MYSELF HAVE contributed an article to *Marxism Today* on the importance of Property, not a subject which would have been given much house-room in the old days. It was an agreeable experience. The article was scrupulously edited and published alongside a courteous and interesting reply from Gareth Steadman Jones, the stalwart of *New Left Review*. This reply, too, echoed the general tone of the most controversial articles in *Marxism Today*, a reflective, concessive sort of tone which acknowledges the difficulties facing the Left, the formidable successes recently scored by the other side, and the need to take account of the social changes which have resulted. Running through *Marxism Today* there is a tacit admission that the ungodly flourish like the green bay tree. Nor does there seem any special reason to expect an inevitable final triumph for the Forces of Socialism. In short, the general atmosphere is not unlike that of, say, the old *Christian Science Monitor* in an unclean world. The duty to report facts—however unpalatable—and acknowledge realities—however distasteful—in plain language may be painful but it cannot be shirked.

Now all this is miles away from the traditional role of the "*Theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party*".

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That phrase encapsulated a very special conception, not least in its awkwardness, giving the impression of a poor translation from some foreign language.

Such a journal was written by and for Party members, in order not so much to understand the world as to change it. The opinions of non-Communists, being the victims of false consciousness, were not only erroneous but valueless. So too were "the facts" as understood by the bourgeois press. Only a high level of abstraction was capable of unmasking class realities. To fall into the prosaic vulgarities of mere reportage was to ensnare oneself in delusion. Unappetising slabs of print plonked on to poor-quality paper without illustration (or, at most, a barely decipherable one of the grain harvest somewhere in the Third World) represented an outward and visible symbol of seriousness of purpose. There was no more need to lighten the reader's burden than there would be in some advanced scientific textbook. Indeed, a certain hermetic, inaccessible quality was indispensable (although, to be fair, even in the old days *Marxism Today* was a good deal more clearly and attractively written than some of its English rivals).

As with all such Marxist works, the journal had a double, intertwined purpose: to elucidate "the scientific truth" about social reality and to assist "the advance of socialism". The second part meant that, in analysing progress so far, it was not permissible for one to admit anything but purely *temporary* setbacks, demanding purely *tactical* adjustments. Yet the drift of much of the material now published by *Marxism Today* is quite different and must be unwelcome to some older readers. By its own account, many of the setbacks being experienced by the British Left in general, and by the Labour Party in particular, appear to be deep-rooted and permanent; and so accordingly are the adjustments which must be made if the Left is to achieve political power.

Worse still, the outside world, instead of being governed by ineluctable if slow-working laws leading eventually to socialism, now seems to have become alarmingly autonomous and unpredictable. Other institutions and personalities (most notoriously, Mrs Thatcher) seem, for some mysterious reason, to have acquired the power to dictate the agenda and set the terms of the argument. Socialists, instead of possessing the key to a complicated code which, if only they can learn to read it aright, will lead them to their long home, now seem to be adrift on some frightful Oakeshottian sea without compass or anchorage. Indeed, survival may involve the humiliating step of taking lessons in seamanship from non-socialists—even if it goes without saying that socialists would transform any such advice for their own purposes.

Designer Socialism

THE TRENDIES, *united, will never be defeated. "Marxism Today" is holding a symposium, 50 years after his death, on the Italian Marxist thinker Gramsci. Its marketing subsidiary, Central Committee Outfitters, is offering readers the appropriate T-shirt, which sports an early 20th-century Italian hammer-and-sickle.*

Designer socialists can also buy a "Marxism Today" duvet cover (limited run of 100 by a leading fabric designer), or leaf through the magazine's Consumer Choice section in search of a futon or a guide to Tuscany.

The absolute dernier cri *on the stylish Left, though, is a pair of Soviet armed forces boxer shorts or jogging trousers, decorated with hammer and sickle. Available at Collet's in Charing Cross Road, London.*

THE GUARDIAN

ALL THIS MAY SOUND superficially like the admiration often expressed by Marx himself for the achievements of the bourgeoisie and his willingness to learn from them. I think it is quite different. There is a fierce optimism about Marx's teaching which is rarely found on the Left these days. The modern socialist's delight is rather in deflating the unrealistic optimism of less sophisticated comrades. What (he takes pride in having the courage to ask) if "late capitalism"—that comforting clockwork term—should transform itself not into socialism but into popular capitalism?

It is perhaps not difficult to place all this in its immediate political setting. It can be described as the most colourful expression of the Eurocommunist tendency in this country and as a celebration of the present dominance of that tendency in the civil war within the British Communist Party. The "Stalinists" are for the moment in eclipse, and so are Stalinist manners. The civilities are now to be respected. The value of "bourgeois" liberties is to be fully appreciated. The rules of parliamentary democracy are to be observed, or at least if they are to be bent a little it must be in ways such as "entryism" into the Labour Party or manipulation of the block vote which may be reprehensible but are scarcely unfamiliar among non-Communists. It goes without saying that this new approach includes unhesitating critical candour towards Communist régimes, including the Soviet Union.

What lies behind all this? There are various interpretations, some overlapping, some conflicting. One sceptical interpretation is that these are conscious tactical shifts to take account of the weakened position of the Communist Party in virtually all Western countries. The only hope of regaining credibility, or even a hearing, is cynically to mimic the language and restraints of bourgeois political debate. This is the rhetorical counterpart of the organisational need to engineer "Popular Fronts" wherever possible and to take part in every "Broad Left" manifestation, either by overt alliance or by infiltration. After all, these tactics have often been dictated or approved by Moscow and found highly effective in situations where the local CP was much stronger. Their usefulness is likely to be relatively even greater when it is so weak that its voice might otherwise be drowned.

A Popular Front of this sort can be presented as a local expression of *glasnost*, a home-grown response to Comrade Gorbachov's encouragement of open-minded, democratically inclined reforms in the USSR. Thus an attractive duet bursts into song, the two voices each reinforcing the pleasant impression left by the other. If all went well, such propaganda

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duets might help Soviet-leaning régimes come to power in the most natural fashion in, say, Britain or West Germany without inducing any sensation of panic.

Towards the more trusting, less sceptical end of the spectrum, it may be said—is already being said—that the Gorbachov reforms are quite genuine: the Soviet leader is "sincerely responding" to the popular discontents with the brutal and rigid aspects of the Soviet system. He is encountering difficulties with the old guard, the "conservatives", and he deserves the support of all men of good will. The Soviet system does not work, and the Russians now admit it; and in the search for greater efficiency, greater democracy will follow. The attitudes of British Communists show a similar readiness to change, to respond to the new economic and governmental imperatives. Both Mr Gorbachov and *Marxism Today* are taken to be part of an attractive, open-minded movement sweeping the Communist world in the direction of a society which is not only more efficient but also more open, humane, and equal.

To put it mildly, there is a good deal of wishful thinking here. The discovery that the Soviet system does not work is scarcely new. From Lenin's resort to the New Economic Policy onwards, again and again exactly the same complaints have been made by Soviet leaders, about sloth, corruption, incompetence, about the failure either to satisfy consumer demands or to meet production targets. The same promises of greater adherence to legal norms, of a closer attention to the wishes of the peasants, the same belief that a reform-minded leadership was being frustrated by a hard-line old guard—all these things are familiar not just from the days of Brezhnev and Khrushchev but also from Stalin, who in his heyday was as good at putting himself over as a "pragmatic" reformer as Mr Gorbachov. The same remedies have been promised and have either faded into insigificance or obvious fraudulence, or been abruptly aborted as soon as they promised to deliver the goods but at the cost of weakening the central power of the Party.

The position in the West is very different. Here it is not a question of putting one's faith in a set of reforms which are to rescue socialism. Here it is a question of loss of faith in the answers provided by Socialism in the sense traditionally understood by the British Communist Party.

There is an unmistakable gloom behind the jaunty exterior of *Marxism Today*. This gloom—unlike a great deal of the Gorbachov hype and ballyhoo—seems to be mostly genuine, although it may be partly tactical as well. The Left in Britain does appear not only to be rather lost but, in the case of many socialists, to be uncomfortably aware of its plight. Certainly, a line of patter can be kept going, existing injustices strung together to form an indictment against Thatcherism, and decaying industrial communities elegised and eulogised as lost patterns of community. But socialism cannot be a coalition of minorities, still less of marginalities. The Dr Marcuse idea of bringing together the-students-and-the-blacks-and-the-poor to inherit the earth now that the industrial workers have deserted the cause was a confession of obsolescence—and widely recognised as such at the time.

Marxism Today represents, I think, a somwhat confused mixture of desires and regrets which do not sit happily together. On the one hand, political alertness and intellectual honesty demand that one recognise that in most ways socialism has failed and people want no more of it. As for the ways in which it could be said to have succeeded—the National Health Service, and so on—non-socialists are quite capable of claiming the credit for them. On the other hand, hope springs eternal, and "the movement" may yet be rescued by ingenious political alliances and strategies. But what reason is there to expect anything from socialism in power but a repetition of failure, and this time without even the excuse of popular assent to the experiment? What serious point is there left in socialist activity except the pursuit of power for its own sake?

I do not think "Eurocommunism" can be written off as a mere confidence trick. Nor does it in my view represent a striving (serious if clumsy) towards a new interpretation of a radiant future. It is rather a symptom, or bundle of symptoms, of the decline of socialism as an historical force—and bluff, desperation, resentment, melancholy, cynicism, realism, even the desire to please are all to be discerned in the tangle.

We should not be surprised that it is such a tangle. The rise of socialism was a tangle too, of an altogether grander and more alarming sort. The rapid shift of country-dwellers into the cities; the rise of mass production; the invention of nationalism in its new form; the growing power of governments; and, more specifically, the liberation of oppressed, clannish, pre-industrial peoples into the bewildering freedom of modern individualist societies; the "ordeal of civility"—all these extraordinarily violent changes, still not fully analysed, let alone understood, had something to do with the appearance of socialism on the scene. It is not surprising that equally complex forces should be, slowly but pitilessly, pushing it towards the exit.

Painting in Winter

Cold comes,
Cat curls
And space for gesture shrinks.
The canvas stands warm wide,
Incomprehensible to winter.

Time of
Tightness,
For minute marks and care,
Monastery precision;
Tempera, gouache, incisive ink.

Monk's marks,
Intense,
Not wall nor canvas grand,
Concentrate a page of hours;
A statement made concise by climate.

Frederick Palmer

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LETTERS

Joys of The Circle

JOHN L. MCALLISTER'S letter "Of 'Wops' and 'Kikes'" (April 1987) is excellent, but omits the crucial point, missed by both H. L. Mencken and Stephen Birmingham. Many Ashkenazi names end in *-sky* or *-ski*. Both are pronounced *-skee*. "Repetitional play" with that syllable would result not in "*kike*" but in "*keek*". "Kike" or "kikes" could only come from a word emphasising *-ike*. Hence the weight I attached, in my book *The Joys of Yiddish*, to the Jews at Ellis Island signing entry-applications with a circle (*kikel* or *kikeleh*) instead of the usual *X*. (To them a fearful symbol, the cross.)

LEO ROSTEN

New York City

Hartley's Diplomacy

I THOUGHT Anthony Hartley's article in the March ENCOUNTER, "Does the Ambassador Have a Future?", contained a brilliant and original analysis of modern politics and diplomacy. The article is shot through with insights, and reflects the application of a powerful intelligence to a subject about which one might think (obviously wrongly) that there is nothing new to be said. Congratulations on publishing it.

ALLAN GOTLIEB

Canadian Ambassador to the USA

Washington D.C.

Yobbos & the Schools

IN HIS REPLY to Michael Tatham's letter (ENCOUNTER, May) Jeffrey Richards says that education has not failed but "education (as I understand and define it) has not yet been tried". If that statement means anything it must mean that all the expenditure on the expansion of education over the last 40 years has been misdirected and wasted. And Mr Richards specifically refers to "the wrong-headed ascendancy in the 1960s" as a cause of our educational and cultural malaise.

Mr Richards nevertheless insists that we need increased expenditure over present levels to build a proper system of education. However, the reaction of most people on being told that we have been spending large sums of money to little or no purpose over several decades will be to ask for an assurance that new policies, methods and management are to be introduced and their effectiveness monitored to ensure that we do not continue to throw good money after bad. This is the reaction when any large enterprise fails and, with respect, Mr Richards's statement of "not failed, but not tried" is a piece of sophistry as puerile as his comment that Mr Tatham "evidently prefers anarchy to culture".

Mr Richards's definition of the requirements of education as given in his letter is fair enough and it is noteworthy that the old elementary schools within their narrow confines fulfilled them pretty well. I am sure it would find general public acceptance. But would it find general acceptance by the teaching establishment? Have those with influence and authority who have contributed largely to the "non-education" been retired or converted, or are they to be removed? I suggest we need answers to these questions before considering Mr Richards's proposition further.

F. D. MELLS

Edgware
Middlesex

Educating the Yobbos?

A Reply to Jeffrey Richards—By MICHAEL TATHAM

IF JEFFREY Richards can persuade himself that the Conservative Government, despite its prodigally increased funding, has "neglected and run down the education service for years" or that it began to "lose by-elections as a result of parental discontent at the level of educational division" ("Letters", ENCOUNTER, May), he can, no doubt, persuade himself of stranger things—even the odd idea that because I consider his call for yet more educational funding a mistaken irrelevance I really prefer anarchy to culture. . . .

There can be no doubt that in his assertion that Her Majesty's Inspectors' Report of 1985 was widely accepted as "authoritative", Mr Richards is quite correct. However, this naive and partial response is, I am sorry to say, as predictable and ridiculous as the Report. Indeed, it is very largely because a great deal of nonsense has for so many years been regarded as authoritative that we are in our present mess.

Reports by semi-literate educationalists did not make their first appearance in 1985, and we have to recognise that our system of education currently owes far too much to the host of Advisers, Inspectors, Educationalists, Training College lecturers, and members of University Departments who have systematically peddled utterly wrong advice since at least the early 1950s. Wrong about reading methods—wrong about "mixed ability" teaching—wrong about discipline—wrong about language-teaching and language-laboratories—wrong about the New Maths—wrong about computers—wrong about the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE)—wrong about the new General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination—in short, wrong about pretty well everything.

And this wrong-headed advice has, of course, been only too widely accepted as authoritative by the insecure, naive, and increasingly poorly-educated men and women who make up the bulk of our teaching force. (It has also been well received by those devoted careerists whose major preoccupation as teachers has been to find the right ploy for levering themselves out of the classroom.)

If we look again at the conclusion to the HMIs' Report which Jeffrey Richards cites as evidence, it is quite easy to see why it is valueless:

> "Few involved in providing or providing for education can take much, if any, pride in a national service within which three-tenths of all lessons seen were unsatisfactory; one-fifth was adversely affected by poor accommodation; a quarter was suffering from shortage of equipment; in three-fifths of the schools where an assessment was possible, the teachers' perceptions of pupils' potential and needs were inadequate. . . . The damaging effects of all this on pupil performance and on the teachers' morale and their ability and willingness to bring about much needed change are showing themselves clearly."

IT IS NOT TOO DIFFICULT to see that what we have is merely a happy example of statistical disinformation, or the ancient decorative art of arranging simple fractions in such a way as to draw attention to their least important quantity. Take "one-fifth was adversely affected by poor accommodation". Put it back on its feet and we find to our astonishment that four-fifths (80%) have good accommodation or are too sensible to make a trumpery excuse if they haven't. In the same way, "a quarter was suffering from shortage of equipment" becomes the sorry fact that three-quarters have quite sufficient equipment—and despite

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this learn almost nothing. To which might be added the obvious point that if equipment was properly cared for and more intelligently ordered there would be more equipment in every school in the land than anyone would know what to do with.

Since it would be uncharitable to suppose that any educated person could have been responsible for such gibbering waffle as "in three-fifths of the schools where an assessment was possible, the teachers' perceptions of pupils' potential and needs were inadequate", presumably, when they had finished with these Looking-Glass statistics, the Inspectors invited their computer to write the Report. The same criticism must apply to the final line with its obligatory but question-begging genuflexion in the sacred direction of our old friend "much needed change". Clearly, this is stuff which could scarcely be redeemed if it were to be completely rewritten in some elementary O-level exercise.

NOR, I am sorry to say, did "Yobbery with Violence", Jeffrey Richards's ENCOUNTER article of February 1987—in very many respects an excellent article—make any reference to the introduction of tighter discipline or a return to formal methods of English teaching.

The nearest he comes to it is the rather different prescription.

> "Self-discipline and intellectual expansion must lie at the heart of this education; and if our schools and universities, properly funded and organised, are not in the vanguard of the onslaught on ignorance, prejudice and barbarism, the future will lie in the hands of savages."

Even that somewhat vague and idealistic sentence has at its core the vital qualification "properly funded and organised". Here is surely the heart of the issue—Jeffrey Richards's belief that the first essential step is additional funding:

> ". . . the necessary cost of the recreation of a solid base upon which a decent education system can be constructed."

Reading these words, one might be forgiven for supposing that the last 35 years of ever-increasing funding and the steady dilution of education had never happened! As if at this very moment teachers and Government were not engaged in destroying what little remains of our examination system at a cost of God-knows-what in additional funding. Or as if 40% additional funding in ILEA had not produced (1981-82) a result, in terms of O-levels, of almost precisely similar proportions *below* the national average.

The root of the difficulty to adapt Jeffrey Richards's use of a familiar quip, is that Education—like Christianity—has been tried only occasionally, and then found both irksome and materially unrewarding. Besides, there is something "divisive" and "undemocratic" about education which is nearly as unpalatable in a popular democracy as the old view that the Kingdom of God had something to do with grace and election and rather few being chosen.

What we think about such things today has been splendidly demonstrated by Geoffrey Partington in his detailed analysis of "Progressivism" in education in the January ENCOUNTER. In the best liberal and democratic style, the teacher has abdicated responsibility—no more naughty value-judgments!—and become a benevolent Resources Person. A few have found a new and more authoritarian role as harbingers of revolutionary social "restructuring".

To set out a practical programme of reform in the present climate is, alas, entirely pointless. Those of us who care about the future of this country and its better "Victorian-Georgian values"—let alone Culture—can do little more at present than attempt to clear away misunderstandings and delusions. We wait in the uncertain hope that something will emerge—perhaps it will be as unwelcome as an educational equivalent of AIDS—to concentrate our minds. It might oblige our cliché-mongers to recognise that there are no comfortable or complete answers.

MICHAEL TATHAM
Little Odell
Bedford

MICHAEL TATHAM is of course perfectly entitled to express his own opinions but I do wish he would stop telling me what my opinions are. I believe in extra funding, tighter discipline and formal English teaching, as clearly outlined in both my ENCOUNTER articles.

JEFFREY RICHARDS
University of Lancaster

Ardagh's "DDR"

I USUALLY enjoy my ENCOUNTER, but the last time out was an exception; John Ardagh's piece on East Germany ("Life in the Other Germany", March and April 1987) was the cause.

On subjects like France Ardagh is a distinguished reporter; but on the matter of the *DDR* he stirs memories of Ward Price and Ronnie Panton writing about the *Reich* 50 years ago. Their approach to a totalitarian Germany, like his, was marked by a reasonableness so misplaced as to verge on the naive.

Let's face it, the *DDR* is little but the nasty, shrivelled rump of Prussia. Backward and bossy, it's the only part of the Germanic world that without interruption has practised despotic rule for, lo, these 55 years. It shows. The quality of governance over there triggered the greatest refugee exodus in our time, and anywhere in the world. It set off the very first popular uprising in the East Bloc—in response to which it erected the longest wall, effected the densest militarisation, and espoused a security *Apparat* so daunting that it's become the country's only strategic export (to comparably police-statist régimes like Libya, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Angola, and Congo-Brazza).

True, the heavies in the ankle-length leather coats no longer operate in the old Stalinoid way down in the cellars of the *Albrechtstrasse*, but on the whole they're still at it. This contributes ineffably to the *feel* of the *DDR* but may represent one of the elements causing quite a few Germans (notably Günther Gaus, Rudolf Augstein, Erhard Eppler, Marion Dönhoff) to regard East Germany—strictly subconsciously one hopes—as perhaps more quintessentially *German* than the Western Federal Republic. To be sure, they would never openly admit this, but at least the present editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* was explicit enough once in a bylined editorial to remark that there could never be a convergence between the outlooks of Germany and America because Germans were, well, too "Hegelian".

Yes, it has an economy that works better than the one in Romania—but how any percipient Westerner can behold it and then call it anything but a bust is beyond me. I've known the place, alas, for a long time, and I still can't think of a single manufactured product, *not one*, that outclasses its counterparts in the West. (Only its athletes do—turned out by a system that helped to bring sado-masochism to organised sport.) Moreover, commerce is a shambles, excepting the tiny, pampered segment reserved for the *nomenklatura*; services are second-rate and peremptory; finance, perhaps mercifully, is substantially a state secret. Indeed, the main thing the economy has going for it is, courtesy of Bonn, a backdoor ajar to the European Market and a steady torrent of ransom pouring in from West Germany, ransom in the form of *Kopfgelder* and various other sums, which East Berlin has managed to extract with admittedly greater legerdemain and certainly greater effectiveness than, say, the *Hizbollah* in Lebanon, but on the same general principle. In the end, the achievements (*Errungenschaften*) of the East German Workers' and Peasants' state loop back to the

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police, or to the coercive mentality that animates the omnipotent leadership. If any superlative is deserved, then it is that East Germany may be the best-lubricated, most quiet-running despotism in the East.

This being so, I can't help but wonder (in considerable discomfort) about John Ardagh's assertion that the people there have accepted the régime. The way I know the place, they most decidedly haven't. Aliens to this most cryptic place would do well to apply decent caution in gauging the population's disposition (the same as they surely would bring to, say, the interpretation of a picture showing Aldo Moro, backdropped by a Red Brigade poster, and holding up a message for the benefit of his captors' cameras).

The melancholy fact remains that the *DDR* is populated by political zombies, organised in a twisted economy where you pay about two cents for a street-car ride to console you for having to wait about eight years for a two-stroke automobile. It is housed badly, and carelessly fed. Leadership is provided by a power-corrupted New Class beholden largely to its own comfortable rigidities and its own ponderous set of "Leftist" superstitions to justify these. If it has catered to "the needs of its people" at all, it is mainly in the sense of the régime that preceded it—which, after all, did provide jobs, ranging from forced labour to make-work, along with *Winterhilfe* and all those helpful *Autobahnen*.

Anyway, it may or may not be a good idea to settle for the *DDR* the way it is, and to stride ahead in the cause of peace, concord, and *glasnost*—without insisting on enfolding it beforehand in a reunified and more civilised Germany. But attempting to sanitise it rhetorically won't work; the damn'd spot will not come out.

DENIS FODOR

Munich
West Germany

AUTHORS

Kenneth Minogue is Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics; "The Idea of Liberty & the Dream of Liberation" was his inaugural lecture, delivered in December 1986. His most recent book is *Alien Powers: The Pure Theory of Ideology* (Weidenfeld, 1985).

Norman Levine is represented in *The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (1987) and in *86: Best Canadian Short Stories* (Oberon) by stories that were first published in ENCOUNTER. Collections of his stories in German and Norwegian translation will be published later this year by Claassen and Gyldendal respectively. Among his other books are *Champagne Barn* (Penguin, original, 1985), *Canada Made Me*, *From a Small Town*, and *I Don't Want To Know Anyone Too Well*.

Zbigniew Herbert's *Report from the Besieged City and Other Poems*, translated by John Carpenter and Bogdana Carpenter, was published this spring by Oxford University Press.

Digby Anderson is Director of the Social Affairs Unit in London. He is the author or contributing editor of fifteen books, and is a regular columnist for *The Times* and *The Spectator*.

Jean-François Revel writes a regular column for *Le Point* in Paris. *How Democracies Perish*, his most recently translated work, was published in 1985 by Weidenfeld (London) and Doubleday (New York).

Max Beloff, Gladstone Professor of Government and Public Administration, University of Oxford, from 1957-74, and Principal of the University College at Buckingham, 1974-79, was created a life peer in 1981. His most recent books are *Wars and Welfare, Britain 1914-1945* (Edward Arnold, 1984) and, as co-author, *The Government of the United Kingdom* (Weidenfeld, 1985).

Dan Jacobson, Reader in English at University College, London, grew up in South Africa and has lived for many years in London. His novels include *The Confessions of Joseph Baisz* (1977), *The Rape of Tamar* (1980); *Her Story*, his latest novel, will be published in the autumn by André Deutsch. Among his other works are a volume of biography, *Time and Time Again* (Deutsch, 1985) and a critical work, *The Story of the Stories* (1982). His articles in ENCOUNTER include stories, reviews and criticism; his most recent piece was a discussion of parents and children, "The Vanishing Act" (November 1985). "In a Lost Language" is adapted from his Introduction to *From a Land Far Off*, edited by Joseph Sherman.

Donald Thomas lives in Wales and is Professor of English at the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology in Cardiff. He has published poetry, fiction and biography, winning the Eric Gregory Award for his first book of poems, *Points of Contact*. His biographies include *Swinburne: The Poet in his World* and *Robert Browning: A Life Within Life* (Weidenfeld, 1979, 1982); *Cardigan, Hero of Balaclava* (1974) is now in Ark paperback. His latest novel, *The Ripper's Apprentice*, was published by Macmillan in 1986.

Bernard Bergonzi, Professor of English at the University of Warwick, is the author, among other works, of *Reading the Thirties* (1978), *The Situation of the Novel* (1979), and *Heroes' Twilight* (1980), all published by Macmillan Press, and *The Myth of Modernism and Twentieth Century Literature* (Harvester Press, 1986). His novel *The Roman Persuasion* was published in 1981 by Weidenfeld.

John Mole's books of poetry include *In and Out of the Apple* and *Homing* (Secker & Warburg, 1984, 1987).

Roger Scruton is Professor of Aesthetics at Birkbeck College, London, and Editor of *The Salisbury Review*. Among his recent publications are *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (Weidenfeld, 1986), *Spinoza* (Oxford University Press, 1986), and *The Meaning of Conservatism*, published in 1984 by Macmillan Press, who this year bring out his latest book, *Untimely Truths*.

Paul Hollander, who was born in Budapest and lived in Hungary under both the Nazi and the Communist régimes, is Professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; a Fellow of the Russian Research Center at Harvard; and author of *Soviet and American Society: A Comparison* (1973), *Political Pilgrims* (Oxford University Press, 1981), and *The Many Faces of Socialism* (Transaction Books, 1983). His *Pilgrims on the Run (revisited)*, ENCOUNTER Pamphlet No 16, is available at £2.00, $3.50.

Ferdinand Mount, political columnist for *The Spectator*, was from 1982-83 Head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit. His books include *The Theatre of Politics* (1972), *The Subversive Family* (1982), and his latest novel, *The Selkirk Strip* (Hamish Hamilton, 1987).

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Life & Letters Today

London

WHAT'S IN A FACE? *W. H Auden was once described [Godfrey Smith writes] as having a face that looked like a wedding cake left out in the rain. Noel Coward was said (by Ken Tynan) to have a face that looked like an old boot—but an unmistakably hand made boot. Spencer Tracy was reputed to have lines on his face that would hold two days of rain. Raymond Chandler once described a woman as having a face like a bucket of mud. James Joyce writes of someone having a face like a late breakfast. David Niven spoke of George Sanders as having a face that looked as though he had rented it on a long lease and lived in it so long he didn't want to move out. And Brendan Behan spoke of someone with a face like a boiled turd.*

All these astonishing faces have one attribute in common. Not one of them could be called "beautiful". Yet we remember them when all the fashion-plate faces are forgotten. Can anyone give me one truly memorable line about a beautiful face?

SUNDAY TIMES

New York City

NAMES & SLURS: **We live in sensitive times and the slur-meter of Baltic Americans swung wildly on learning that in an episode of the television series "Highway To Heaven" the leader of a neo-Nazi group seen tormenting an Auschwitz survivor is called "Jan Baltic".**

On behalf of the million of Americans originating in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, two Senators have protested to NBC and producer Michael Landon, and demanded that the name be changed before the show goes out. They have refused.

DAILY MAIL

Paris

FRANGLAIS (ONGOING STORY): *The French government has moved to head off another intrusion of Franglais: the word "zapping", for switching television channels by remote control to dodge commercials.*

The "General Commission on Terminology", noting that this practice was gaining in France, zipped in with a home-made word for it: **"saute-chaine"** *(or channel-jump).*

Among the Commission's other approved contributions to the French language, announced the same day, were **"télévent"** *(for selling by telephone),* **"essaimage"** *(for "spin-off") and* **"cubiteneur"** *for the allegedly English* "cubitainer".

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Philadelphia

SAME OLD STORY: WHAT DO YOU READ? **Romantic novels with stereotyped plots make up an estimated 40% of all mass-market paperback fiction books in America, and many women read up to four of them a day [Adrian Berry reports].**

The stories in these books are almost all the same, said Prof. Janice Radway, a social scientist at the University of Pennsylvania. They are devoid of violence, sex or action, but concern only the love relationship between a man and a woman.

The man, an ordinary sort of person who is not in any way *"macho"* is preoccupied with wealth and social position. There is tension between him and his wife. Then she persuades him that love is more important, and they both live happily ever after.

These women readers are not uneducated, Prof. Radway told the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Of those studied, half graduated from high school, 32% had attended some college, and 12% had attended graduate school.

But they were wholly indifferent to "serious" literature. "They'd need a whole re-education to think that John Updike is interesting. They'd see his books as incredibly boring," she said.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

London

LESS SAID THE BETTER: *Labour is keeping quiet about who dreamed up its poster campaign, launched yesterday. The* **"Less hospitals, less beds, less staff, looks like the Tories couldn't care less"** *slogan is certain, however, to have been approved by its Shadow Communications Agency. This is a voluntary group of admen sympathetic to Labour, who wish to remain anonymous for fear their agency bosses would object.*

The use of **"less"** *rather than* **"fewer"** *has already attracted sneers.*

But it is hardly worse than Labour's 1983 slogan thought up by an adman: **"Think positive. Act positive. Vote Labour."**

THE TIMES

New York City

TEMPEST IN A "THE" POT: **The most common word in the English language is *the*. Because familiarity bred Aesopian contempt, we tended to take *the* for granted. Not any more [William Safire writes].**

We do not often write *Norman Mailer, the writer*, because that implies that we are not referring to the other Norman Mailer, the milkman; worse, it seems to say, "I am describing what Norman Mailer does, which any fool should know, but you may not." By placing the description ahead of the name, we are less likely to offend people who know all they want to know about Norman Mailer. Changing the article from *the* to *a—a writer, Norman Mailer*—suggests that he is a journeyman scribbler and will get you vilified in his next novel.

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

London

RHYME & REASON: *Is "Baa, Baa, Blacksheep" racist?*

Like many other nursery rhymes, it is political and referred to the wool trade—which was rightly described as "the flower and strength and revenue and blood of England", and was subject to strict laws and taxes. The old words ran:

"Two for my master, and one for my dame,
But none for the little boy who cries down the lane."

"My master" *was the King, who took two thirds of the profits,* **"my dame"** *was the Church, which took one third, leaving nothing at all for the "common people".*

This is the sort of thing that makes history come alive for young children, and deserves to be valued accordingly. To call it "racist" is sheer fabrication.

LONDON EVENING STANDARD

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LITERARY · PLEASURES

Textual Confrontations

Comparative Readings in Latin American Literature

ALFRED J. MAC ADAM

In a feat of truly comparative literary criticism, Mac Adam juxtaposes works by such as Auden and Neruda, Conrad and Donoso, Lewis Carroll and Borges, Hardy and Vargas Llosa. "In these essays, Latin American and Anglo-American authors come together in dialogue and in the process display their affinities and differences. This delightful and instructive spectacle reveals that while Latin American literature is rooted in Western culture, it has used its originality and renovating energy to reinvigorate the Western tradition."—Mario Vargas Llosa

"Race," Writing, and Difference

Edited by
HENRY LOUIS GATES, Jr.

These eighteen essays convey the message that neither literature nor its critical theories are color-blind, neutral, apolitical, or universal. Contributors include Jacques Derrida, Barbara Johnson, Bernard Lewis, Mary Louise Pratt, and Edward Said. Illus. Also available in paperback

He Do the Police in Different Voices

The Waste Land *and Its Protagonist*

CALVIN BEDIENT

In this finely-crafted line-by-line analysis of Eliot's great poem, Bedient contends that the various voices, often viewed as a mere medley, are all "done" by a single performer—a deliberately created, nameless protagonist. "Boldly original...the most complete, adventurous, and stimulating study of *The Waste Land* I have read. It combines daring with care to avoid the distorting cliches of Eliot criticism."
—Lyndall Gordon, Oxford University
Also available in paperback

Photo by E.O. Hoppé, from the Mansell Collection, London

Trollope and Comic Pleasure

CHRISTOPHER HERBERT

Herbert outlines a challenging theory of comedy which illuminates Trollope's fiction and clarifies the deeply equivocal role of the comic in Victorian culture. "Herbert's work is startlingly original, asserting with real authority the crucial place of pleasure in comedy, the astonishing complexity of the mode, and the intricacy and vividness of Trollope's play within the form."—James R. Kincaid, University of Colorado, Boulder

Salome and the Dance of Writing

Portraits of Mimesis in Literature

FRANÇOISE MELTZER

By looking at how the painted, framed portrait appears in various literary texts, Meltzer reveals it as a telling measure of literature's views on itself, on the politics of representation, and on the power of writing. "There is not a boring sentence in the book; every analysis is fresh and refreshing; every interpretation proposes new and extraordinarily insightful understandings. In short, this book is superb."
—Ross Chambers, University of Michigan

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